Kopis Ramona Minodora
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Coordonator științific,
Conf. univ. dr. habil.
Cristina Chevereșan

Doctorand,
Teodora Cristina Vela

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The Postmodernist (Anti)Canon: From High Culture to Popular Culture and Back

Coordonator științific,
Conf. univ. dr. habil.
Cristina Chevereșan

Doctorand,
Teodora Cristina Vela

Timișoara
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INTRODUCTION

What has been historically perceived as a clear distinction between two fields of culture, the high culture and the low or popular culture, has, gradually, become indistinguishable in Postmodernism. While established novelists such as Kurt Vonnegut, William Burroughs, or Thomas Pynchon make use of popular culture concepts in their writings, popular entertainment - such as Hollywood movies or pop songs - often references philosophical debates or experiments with style. The trend is easily distinguishable the other way around as well, as more and more (high/awarded) artists get involved in popular culture, using social media or popular entertainment in order to address both knowledgeable and unknowledgeable audiences. Relevant examples include Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek and his well-known YouTube videos, Andy Warhol's interest in popular cinematography and music, the collaborations between movie directors and writers, interviews of notable writers by popular magazines such as *Playboy*, or series made by popular television about canonical writers, such as MTV's one on Franz Kafka.

Generally, throughout the latter half of the 20th century, it has become extremely hard, if not impossible, to properly distinguish between the two aforementioned fields or, rather, subdivisions of culture. While, arguably, the distinction still exists between the highest forms of high culture and the lowest forms of popular culture, even such attempts at classifications are questioned and can be aptly challenged. Hence, attempting to differentiate between the two fields has become, in itself, irrelevant.

Nonetheless, as the lines between the two types of cultures are increasingly blurred, an inevitable paradox surfaces: if Postmodernists claim that the distinction is long gone and irrelevant, what are the prestigious awards acknowledging? Should such prizes still exist? Moreover, what is the purpose of the (literary) canon and who should be a part of it? Based on what should the distinction between a good novel and a bad novel be made? Likewise, which books or trends should be studied in universities? Such questions have generated tremendous debates over the last few decades. Although the peak of the dispute was reached during the 1950s', such questions still cause controversy nowadays. To give just an example, which will be discussed in more depth in one of the following chapters: the Nobel Prize committee's decision to award Bob Dylan the award

for literature in 2016 generated avid debates, seemingly reigniting arguments one hundred years old.

The theoretical chapter of this paper will, therefore, attempt to answer some of the above-mentioned questions. The first part of the chapter, entitled "Setting the Boundaries", will examine some of the traditional definitions of high culture and popular culture. In order to comprehend the reasons why Postmodernist critics claim that the distinction is irrelevant, it is important to properly understand the institutionalized conventions they renounce. In other words, we must first understand the gist of the distinction before trying to deconstruct it. Hence, this section will focus on traditional schools of thought, such as the Frankfurt School, with its leading theoreticians (Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, or Herbert Marcuse), and the Mass Society Theorists (T.S. Eliot, Ortega y Gasset, or Dwight Macdonald, to name but a few).

The second part of the theoretical chapter, "Postmodernism: Erasing the Boundaries", expands upon the *high versus low* debate following the Second World War. As a consequence of the numerous technological advances, such as the boom of the radio or the TV industries - which make such products available to the masses, not only to the rich, as they used to be -, the medium of culture also undergoes fundamental changes. While most critics acknowledge the fusion between high and low culture, and the apprehension of culture into the capitalist machine to a point that all culture can be seen as consumer culture, the first section of this sub-chapter, "The Origins of the Debate", analyzes the main arguments which are brought up by either side to support its beliefs. Hence, two opposing views of the 1960s are outlined: those who welcome this change, and believe that the two fields should become even more interconnected, and those who claim that by blending the two, the ground is leveled and Culture in its entirety is at risk.

The next two sections, "The Myth of the 'Mass"" and "The Postmodernist Society. Empowerment and Popular Culture" focus on countering the traditionalist arguments, which claim that the fusion between high and popular culture equals the end of all culture. As such, we are going to focus on Postmodernist theoreticians, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Patrick Brantlinger, Angela McRobbie, or Lawrence Levine, who claim that the traditional distinction between high and popular was based on misconceptions and stereotypes. Moreover, such a distinction reinforces Eurocentric and WASP biases, suppressing the voices of marginal identities or cultures which, historically speaking, have not been allowed to be part of what is commonly deemed as Culture and/ or History.

Finally, the focal point of last part of the theoretical chapter, entitled “The Canon”, is the (literary) canon and its relevance in today’s culture. Having determined that nowadays it is virtually impossible to distinguish between high and popular culture, this section is going to emphasize some of the ways in which the Postmodern society recognizes value, while also pointing at the faults of the traditional canon selection. While Postmodernist writers do not believe that the canon is an efficient tool for preserving value anymore, paradoxically, their subversive works become incorporated in the canon. In order to illustrate this point, some of the reactions which followed Bob Dylan’s winning the Nobel Prize for Literature are going to be discussed.

The theoretical chapter is meant to set the background for the analytical chapters, which are going to analyze some Postmodern works that challenge the *high versus low* dichotomy. Thus, while I am not interested in proving whether one text is part of high culture or not, - as I have already shown that such a task is not only irrelevant, but even impossible to thoroughly defend -, the analytical chapters will closely observe the way in which literary genres traditionally associated with low culture, such as the science fiction and the gothic, become tools in the hands of Postmodernist writers, meant to empower marginal voices and identities.

The main method used to analyze these texts will be thematic analysis. Accordingly, traditional science fiction or gothic themes, such as space travel, the alien, the haunted house, the cursed ancestry, or abjection are going are going to be analyzed in-depth to show how they are used by Postmodernist writers in order to challenge certain aspects regarding the genre itself or the late-capitalist society. Moreover, in order to further emphasize Postmodernist features such as interdisciplinarity and intertextuality, which are inherently transgressive of the high/pop division, I will focus my analysis on different types of texts, including novels, short stories, song lyrics, theater plays or musicals, movies, or song videos.

The second chapter will focus on science fiction’s transition from an inferior genre to one of the most popular in both academia and popular culture, throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. While the first section, entitled “Science Fiction: from Popular to Empowering”, will provide a brief overview regarding the genre’s history and some of the stereotypes attributed to it, as well as the way in which such preconceptions were deconstructed by Postmodernists, the next three parts will look at how Postmodern science fiction works in practice. Via these works, it will be emphasized that science fiction is used in order to empower marginal identities and subvert traditional hierarchies of power.

The section entitled "The Astronaut" will draw a comparison between Arthur C. Clarke's novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation, and David Bowie's songs, *Space Oddity* and *Blackstar*. Thus, employing Darko Suvin's concept of outer space's usage as a metaphor for inner space, this chapter will point out that, in Postmodern science fiction works such as those mentioned above, the astronaut becomes an embodiment of the incomplete Postmodern identity. Similarly, the third section will show that the alien, as presented in Walter Tevis' novel *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Nicholas Roeg's film adaptation, David Bowie's album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, as well as Bowie's and Enda Walsh's musical, *Lazarus*, represents the archetype of the fragmented, hybrid, and alienated identity. The final part of the chapter will analyze David Bowie's album, *1.Outside*, which discusses the status of the work of art in the Postmodern world, by employing cyberpunk techniques. I believe that at least briefly discussing cyberpunk is indispensable, since it is one of the most prolific Postmodern science fiction genres.

The second analytical chapter, structured similarly to the previous one, focuses on the gothic's transition from a second-rate genre to one which is used in Postmodernity in order to subvert tradition and disrupt conventional narratives, both in academia and in popular culture. Correspondingly, the first section summarizes the historical and theoretical aspects of the genre and of its transition, while the next two sections represent exemplifications of Postmodern gothic works. The first text which is going to be analyzed is Nick Cave's novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, emphasizing the ways in which this text challenges the idyllic traditional portrayals of the small town and of religious communities, while also empowering outsider or abnormal voices. In the next section, a comparison between Flannery O'Connor's short story collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, and Nick Cave's *Murder Ballads* album is going to be drawn, in order to show that in Postmodern Southern gothic writings violence becomes a way in which the traditional hierarchy of power is disrupted.

Overall, the aim of this paper is to conclude that genres which have been previously disregarded by high culture, such as the gothic and science fiction, represent compelling ways of dealing with alterity and empowering marginal identities in Postmodernism. By analyzing both traditional literary texts, such as novels and short stories, and more recent popular culture products, such as songs or movies, the analysis will prove the efficiency of these genres in Postmodernity as a whole, not just in one field or another. Moreover, by mixing traditionally high culture and popular

culture elements, such an analysis could open the gates for a more democratic and open academic community, where texts from a multitude of sources are taken into account. As such, while my analysis only focuses on David Bowie's and Nick Cave's works, future analyses could further on draw comparisons between pop singers, novelists, film directors, or other individuals or groups who are actively involved in the field of culture.

I. The Cultural Debate: A Theoretical Framework

This chapter will provide the theoretical framework for my thesis. Accordingly, its main focus will be on the high versus the popular culture debate, as it has been perceived at various historical stages. While I am going to focus on the Postmodernist approach, it is important to underline some of the cultural theories which have, in time, contributed to the development of this debate. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive examination of all these cultural trends, but rather to present an overview of the most relevant theories and show how they have affected the cultural field and the process of value recognition.

The first section**,** *Setting the Boundaries*, will look at the most important cultural theories from the 19th and the 20th centuries. Triggered by the birth of a new society, following the Industrial Revolution, these theories mark the beginning of the *high* versus *popular* debate, and they are vital to properly understanding the future of the debate. Hence, after attempting to define our terms, we will examine the Frankfurt School and its leading theorists, such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, or Walter Benjamin. Next, we will focus on the mass society theorists, and their belief that popular, or mass, culture is inherently dangerous for the well-being of a society.

In the second section, *Postmodernism: Erasing the Boundaries*, we will follow this debate through into Postmodernism, where the concepts of *high* or *popular* themselves become increasingly problematic and vague. We are going to focus on some of the criticism which Postmodernist theoreticians have brought against the traditional distinction between high and low culture, as they show that this division has never, in fact, been as clear as it was presented by the Frankfurt School or by the mass society theories. Thus, will investigate some of the myths, or historical fallacies, on which, according to Postmodernist theorists, the traditional critics based their assumptions. Some of these myths are related to the existence of a golden standard in history, of a working-class popular culture in the 19th century, or of the fear that the masses taking over equals the extinction of civilization. Last but not least, this chapter will also indicate some of the ways in which, in the Postmodern era, popular culture is no longer seen in negative terms, but rather treated as an empowering device and as a tool for destabilizing hierarchies and challenging authorities.

In the final section of the theoretical chapter, entitled *The Canon*, we will focus our attention on the status of the literary canon in Postmodernism. As this paper ultimately deals with literature, this chapter is going to underline some of the shifts which occurred in the process of canon formation, in its transition from Modernism to Postmodernism. Consequently, the essential points of this chapter are the process of value creation and value recognition, and the relevance of the critical institution as the main value legislator in a society which praises the pluralism of values. We are going to briefly touch upon themes such as the crisis of the intellectual, anti-intellectualism, or censorship in the literary field. We are also going to analyze the *high versus low* debate from inside the canon, as we look at the controversy generated by the Swedish Academy's decision to award the Nobel Prize for Literature to Bob Dylan in 2016.

1. Setting the Boundaries

Throughout centuries, the concepts of *popular culture*, *high culture*, or even *culture* have undergone multiple transformations, which have made it hard for them to be constrained to one certain definition or another. According to the period and context in which they were used, the meaning varied to lesser or greater degrees. Consequently, the following paragraphs will present some common understandings of high and popular culture, while also pointing out the inconsistencies within those viewpoints. Thus, this section does not attempt to provide a final definition for any of the terms, but rather to illustrate the way in which they have been misunderstood or simplified in order to fit certain categories, such as *good* or *bad.*

Additionally, in this section we will also look at one the most important schools of thought of the early 20th century, The Frankfurt School, as well as what have been called the mass society theorists. For them, there is a clear distinction between high culture and popular culture, and they believe that this distinction should be preserved in order for the society to prosper. Although their theories are no longer valid in the Postmodern world, where both the mass products and the mass audiences have evolved to sustain the pluralism of value, their writings heavily influenced the development of the cultural scene.

Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a context for the high versus the low debate. In order to properly understand the Postmodernist views on culture, it is necessary give an in-depth look to the traditional attitudes, which circulated in the intellectual communities throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, both in Europe and in America. Keeping in mind that Postmodernist views on culture come as a reaction to what is perceived as the elitist, or high Modernist, view, this chapter will discuss these traditional theories, while the next chapter will deal with the criticism which was brought upon them by Postmodernists.

1.1. High Culture and Popular Culture. Definitions.

Before even talking about *high* or *pop* culture, it is important to take a closer look at the term *culture* per se. Not surprisingly, Raymond Williams opens his influential essay "Culture and Masses" with the remark that the word "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (R. Williams, "Culture and Masses" 25). Etymologically, the word *culture* comes from the Latin *cultura* which, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary, meant "the tilling of land, act of preparing the earth for crops" (Online Etymology Dictionary).

The term started getting complicated, Raymond argues, around the 15th century, when various other meanings were added, supplementary to its original, agrarian meaning. Thus, he identifies three possible meanings: 1. "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development", 2. "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group", and 3. "the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (R. Williams, "Culture and Masses" 27). Consequently, according to the context in which it is used, the word "culture" can have a more general or a more specialized meaning. There can be a food culture, a sports culture, or simply a "culture", when employing the last item in Raymond's definition. According to him, that is the meaning which has the most extensive use today.

Keeping the ambiguity of the word culture in mind, it is to be expected that *pop culture* and *high culture* might be even more difficult to define. Simply put, at the first glance, we may be tempted to say that by *popular culture* we mean activities, practices, or artworks which are enjoyed by most people, while high culture represents more complex practices or artworks, which require more knowledge in order to be enjoyed. In other words, the concept of *high* is generally associated with class, taste, and knowledge, while the *popular* with low, undifferentiated masses, and cheap entertainment. Although this dichotomic view on the two terms is how they may have been perceived at the beginning of the 20th century, nowadays it is more complicated to draw a line between the two. This superficial association between the terms is what led to numerous debates throughout the 20th century, as critics were either very vocal about maintaining the boundary between the so-called *high* culture and *popular* culture, or pointed out how meaningless such an act would be, since the two are very much connected.

Defining popular culture according to the size of its audience, as "simply culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people" (Storey 5), can be, however, quite problematic. By

claiming that popular culture is enjoyed by a large number of people (masses), one can wonder how many people exactly "many" means. Classic artworks, such as Michelangelo's sculptures or Shakespeare's plays, are enjoyed by large amounts of people. Are they popular culture in the same way in which the tv series *The and The Restless* is? Is number relevant in any way when we categorize a work of art? Some may say that what matters is not the number, but the quality of the audience: educated people have a more refined taste, while people who lack education are drawn to simpler forms of entertainment. However, this paints a rather unrealistic picture of the educated group, as individuals who do not take pleasure in listening to a pop song, or watching an action movie, insinuating that they are only concerned with obscure and elitist products, made to engage their thinking. It is common knowledge that the Algerian philosopher Albert Camus was a football fan ("Albert Camus and football"): does that mean that football is high culture or that Camus is part of the mass audience? Philosopher Pierre Bourdieu addresses this issue in his monumental work, *Distinction,* which will be discussed later on. As such, he argues that the concept of *taste* is nothing but a social construct, based on class privilege and consumption patterns.

Others point out that intentionality in the work of art is what categorizes it as high or popular culture. Thus, while popular culture is simply made for entertaining the masses, high culture comes as a "result of an individual act of creation" (Storey 6). Nevertheless, such a definition, as John Storey argues, does not take into consideration the historical developments in the fields of both high and popular culture, and that, throughout history, various elements have migrated from one field to another (Storey 6). Charles Dickens, for example, who had been publishing his stories in magazines aimed at larger audiences, is now considered part of the high literary canon. William Shakespeare, as Lawrence Levine points out in *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, was considered a popular playwright up until the 19th century, when the elites put him on a pedestal and distanced him from the masses. Moreover, it is also debatable what *individuality* or *originality* mean in this context, as artists often influence each other, and they work in environments in which they get to exchange ideas or techniques, or even borrow from one another.

Financial gain has been another argument used to draw the boundary between the two: while popular art products such as movies, books, or music are created in order to produce profit in the capitalist world, high art does not revolve around money, its only purpose being aesthetics. However, such a definition tends to overlook the rather expensive theater or opera tickets, or the exorbitant amounts of money invested at auctions and art galleries. It may even be argued that

once something is categorized as *high culture*, its value on the market increases, as seen in the case of paintings. Thus, high culture's limited audience can be also explained in relation to wealth: because it is so expensive, the common people show less interest in it.

Popular culture could also be defined as an ideal business model which creates uniform products, directly marketed for undistinguishable audiences, who accept them without thinking. However, if the mass taste is undifferentiated, John Fiske wonders why big movies, with extensive marketing behind them, still fail at the box-office; why pop songs, written specifically to sell and entertain mass audiences, can still fail in the charts ("Popular Discrimination" 215). This clearly shows that the mass taste is not as homogenous as some may argue and, moreover, that there are certain rules which regulate the production of cultural goods. Audiences are capable of distinguishing between one good or another according to a certain set of values, as John Fiske further on emphasizes that "the ability of the people to discriminate between the products of capitalism, particularly those of its culture industries, should never be underestimated" ("Popular Discrimination" 215).

Overall, the classic definitions of the terms seem to add value to one over the other: while high culture is generally regarded as positive, popular culture has rather negative meanings. Historically, Raymond Williams argues, popular culture was defined by others, not by the people themselves, and even today "it still carries two older senses: inferior kinds of work (cf. popular literature, popular press as distinguished from quality press); and work deliberately setting out to win favour" (R. Williams, *Keywords* 180). The historical context which leads to the identification of popular culture as negative will be investigated later on but, for the moment, it is important to underline the general perception regarding the two types of culture: popular culture is seen as *inferior* in relation to high culture.

High culture is considered superior in terms of taste, knowledge, refinement, disinterest in financial gain, purity of artistic intentionality, intellectual audience etc. Some Postmodernist critics, such as Herbert Gans, point out ironically that, ultimately, the only reason why high culture is superior to other types of culture is because "more money and schooling are better than less" (Gans, "American Popular Culture" 20). Thus, he implies what many other Postmodernist critics have hinted at, that traditional high culture is simply a type of culture created by the rich for the rich.

Accordingly, compared to the rest of the definitions given to high and popular culture so far, Herbert Gans' offers the leveling ground, focusing on the purpose of the cultural or artistic product. He argues that the reason why high culture was considered superior to popular culture is based on the assumption that "aesthetic standards are universal and must be met by everyone" (Gans, "American Popular Culture" 19), but, in reality, they are different for every social group: "all human beings have cultural wants and perhaps needs" (Gans, "American Popular Culture" 19). The quality of the product they use to satisfy those needs may be different, but the result is ultimately the same: similarly to how individuals of middle or lower tastes fantasize over movie stars or athletes, high culture consumers take interest not only in serious novels, but also in "exhibitionistic novelists, artists, [or] composers" (Gans, "American Popular Culture" 19).

The Marxist definition of popular culture, which is shared by most Postmodernist thinkers, highlights it as a political concept, as "a contested site for political constructions of 'the people' and their relation to the 'power bloc'" (Hall qtd in Storey 11). Marxist thinkers, such Stuart Hall, see popular culture as a field of struggle, where meaning is negotiated between the ruling class and the subordinated classes. Based on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, defined as a way in which the dominant groups keep their power in the society by seeking consent from those who are subordinated (Strinati 156), Hall concludes that popular culture is neither imposed nor spontaneous, but a place where negotiations and exchanges between various fields of culture take place. Thus, it becomes a place where previously silenced social, ethnic, or religious groups can seek empowerment and legitimization.

Therefore, drawing a clear distinction between high and popular culture seems a Sisyphean task. As technology develops, so do the cultural products and the available entertainment. With the Internet blurring the lines between classes and offering everybody the power to express themselves, we can relate to what Tony Bennet claims, when he says that "the concept of popular culture is virtually useless, a melting pot of confused and contradictory meanings capable of misdirecting inquiry up any number of theoretical blind alleys" (Bennet 18). By attempting to draw a coarse distinction between high and popular culture, we do, in fact, place the two concepts in a box, and we overlook the multitude of interactions and associations that exist within the field of culture.

This directs us, however, to a last possible interpretation of popular culture and high culture, which is specific to Postmodernism no longer sees any difference between the two fields,

celebrating the mixture of styles and genres. Popular culture is no longer considered inferior to high culture. Moreover, the distinction between the two is irrelevant, if still existent. Dick Hebdige interestingly noticed that "in the west popular culture is no longer marginal, still less subterranean. Most of the time it simply is culture" (qtd in Storey 14).

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that another element which adds to the indecisive and problematic nature of the debate is related to the way in which people understand popular culture in relation to other types of culture, not necessarily high. Ergo, if high culture seems to have stabilized on certain preconceptions, popular culture has often misunderstood and mistaken for mass culture, folk culture, or low culture. Accordingly, as a side note, the following paragraphs will briefly underline the differences between these terms.

Mass culture, which we will talk more about when we analyze the mass society theory, is defined according to its target audience: the masses. The masses are perceived as homogenous and undifferentiated, this leading to monotonous cultural products, which reinforce stereotypes or present the same ideas repeatedly. There can be no originality in a mass product. Although the mass aspect of popular culture has often been emphasized by traditional critics, postmodern critics reject this perception of the mass audience, as we have seen above in John Fiske's statements. Thus, even though the two terms might have been interchangeable in the 19th century, nowadays popular culture and mass culture are not synonymous.

For some people, popular culture equals folk culture, as a type of culture made by people for the people. Folk culture is regional, and part of the identity of a certain group of people, encompassing all the legends, myths, songs, or beliefs of a community. The belief that popular culture and folk culture are the same, however, appears to be a populist approach, meant to elevate popular culture, while overlooking the capitalist process of production behind a cultural good. While popular culture is democratic and has a globalizing effect, folk culture is local and interested in the particular. As Bennet notes, this view is "often equated with a highly romanticized concept of working-class culture constructed as the major source of symbolic protest within contemporary capitalism" (Bennet 27). Hence, if some see popular culture and folk culture as the same thing, other critics, such as Dwight Macdonald, argue that popular culture replaced folk culture, mass production having destroyed the creative genius of folk culture (Macdonald, "A Theory" 16).

Finally, in many instances, popular culture is mistaken for low culture. Low culture, according to Herbert Gans, is a type of culture accessible to the lowest income category, and it is

based on stereotypes and generalizations (Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* 95). Low culture and popular culture are not identical, however, since Gans argues that the culture industry presents little interest for the poorest social strata: they do not have the financial power to interact with most of the cultural products advertised (Gans, "American Popular Culture" 24). In other words, mass goods are not produced for people without capital. This public is generally avoided by cultural entrepreneurs, since they either do not have the money to pay for movie tickets, buy music records, or even own a television, and they generally lack the education necessary to read and understand books (popular or not).

1.2. The Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School is one of the most important critical thought institutions of the first half of the 20th century. Initially located in Frankfurt, the school is associated with social theory and critical philosophy, and its main focal points are the critique of capitalist society and Enlightenment, dealing with social pathologies, as well as analyses of social emancipation. Its leading critics, in particular Theodor Adorno, Max Horkeimer, Leo Lowenthal, or Herbert Marcuse advocated for keeping the distinction between high culture and popular culture intact, as they believed that mass production has a negative impact on society, allowing those in charge of the culture industry to brainwash audiences according to their political agenda.

Their preoccupation with keeping the distinction clear, however, can be explained through the context in which the school developed: in an era marked by extremist regimes coming to power, they fought to keep art autonomous, free from any political bias, as popular culture was often blended with propaganda. Andreas Huyssen notes that at the time in which such theories were contouring, in the beginning of the twentieth century, preserving art's autonomy was the only way in which it could be saved from ideology and, more precisely, from becoming a tool in the hands of fascism or other totalitarian regimes (Huyssen ix).

The reason why mass art could be such an effective tool in the hands of oppressive regimes is the impact they supposedly have on audiences. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer claim that in capitalist cultures not only are the cultural products identical, but the audiences are equally undistinguishable. Thus, as a consequence of the dissipation of precapitalist communities, which were replaced by technology and industry, the capacity of the culture industry to replicate itself infinitely leads to "cultural chaos", which is "infecting everything with sameness" (Adorno and Horkheimer 94). Mass culture teaches obedience and passivity, offering only the illusion of choice. Moreover, Horkheimer and Adorno claim that audiences do not have any real power over the production cycle of a mass object: although they are led to believe that the culture industry offers them what they ask for, the products are, in fact, ideologically charged by those in positions of power, in what they call "a cycle of manipulation" (Adorno and Horkheimer 95).

The passive acceptance of whatever the culture industry offers, while believing that it is what they asked for, is what leads to the eradication of struggle. Consequently, the majority does not rebel against the ruling class anymore, but obediently accepts its fate. The idea that the working

class should quietly accept its place in the hierarchy is embedded in all the mass culture products, and Adorno and Horkheimer offer as example the cartoons: like "Donald Duck in the cartoons … the unfortunate victim in real life receive their beatings so that the spectators can accustom themselves to theirs" (110). By providing entertainment, the culture industry makes the audiences forget about the real-life problems and diminishes their capacity to become active agents in the society: "Amusement always meant putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness" (Adorno and Horkheimer 116).

The "obedience to social hierarchy" (Horkheimer and Adorno 104) is taught not only by brainwashing audiences into passivity, but also by vilifying those who refuse to comply. Those who denounce mass culture for its cheapness and uniformity are marked as outsiders, as "connoisseurship and expertise are proscribed as the arrogance of those who think themselves superior" (106). Thus, in order to be accepted, one has to wholeheartedly accept what mass culture offers and never question the authority. Mediocrity is instituted as norm by a culture which turns the average into heroic, as people mindlessly follow celebrities' advice, and are ready to consume whatever product they advertise (Horkheimer and Adorno 126).

Those who control the culture industry are not interested in developing the consumers' intellectual abilities, but in providing cultural goods which are not difficult to decipher. Adorno and Horkheimer are particularly critical of the light music and film industry, which they believe that rob the work of art of any intellectual engagement, as the final product is "withering [the] imagination and spontaneity of the consumers" (100). They call the movie a "dreamless art" (98), which feeds the audiences the same "old ideas, which are presented as new" (106). Similarly, they argue that music is very predictable to the trained ear, and its success is based precisely on this predictability: "the prepared ear can always guess the continuation after the first bars of a hit song and is gratified when it actually occurs" (99). In his influential essay published in 1963, *Culture Industry Reconsidered,* Theodor Adorno argues that while film makers "would very much like to make adults into eleven-year-olds" (Adorno 108), popular music listeners are "arrested at the infantile age … they are childish; their primitivism is not that of the underdeveloped, but that of the forcibly retarded" (Adorno, *Essays on Music* 303)

Therefore, in order to keep art free from the corruption of mass culture, we should fight to keep art "purposeless" (Horkheimer and Adorno 128). If mass art is audience-oriented, seeking profit and offering entertainment, pure art should only care about its own aesthetics and creativity.

Art should be divorced from its audience, as Horkheimer and Adorno argue that "the purposelessness of the great modern work of art is sustained by the anonymity of the market" (127). Consequently, the great modern writer does not write with an audience in mind, whom he or she tries to please, but follows his or her own inspiration, without seeking any gratification or financial profit. If in the past, either patronage or the expensive production costs (which influenced the selling prices) kept mass audiences at bay, the "cheapness of mass-produced luxury articles" (127) makes it possible for everyone today to have access to a cultural product. In turn, this makes creators more willing to please the masses, and, thus, create objects which are specially tailored for customers, rather than follow their own artistic creeds.

It is important to note that by mixing the two cultures, not only are high culture's standards lowered, but also a "compulsory intellectualization of amusement" takes place (Adorno and Horkheimer 114). Thus, the "late liberal taste" is legitimized and imposed as norm, and "frozen genres", such as the short story, the hit song, the problem movie or the sketch take over the industry (Adorno and Horkheimer 107). In addition to the deteriorating quality of cultural and artistic products, Adorno and Horkheimer are also critical of the way in which people take pride in their knowledge about non-values (what they call the "intellectualization of amusement"): they boast about their knowledge about a certain celebrity's life, or about the fact that they know a lot of information about a certain movie or song. Mere entertainment is presented as a work of art.

The reason for the deteriorating quality of culture, and popular culture in particular, is attributed to the Enlightenment, and the naïve belief in the power of science and in progress, which gave birth to a mass society that is killing individuality and slowly limiting the human freedom. Theodor Adorno says that "the total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment" (Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered" 108). He also argues that the blurring of the boundaries works "to the detriment of both …. The seriousness of high art is destroyed in the speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational constrains imposed on the rebellious resistance" (Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered" 103).

Herbert Marcuse, another main figure from the Frankfurt School, sees popular culture as affirmative culture, which he defines as "a real where we may enter in order to be refreshed and renewed in order to be able to continue with the ordinary affairs of everyday life" (paraphrased in Storey 195). The culture industry provides the consumers with an alternative reality which offers illusory solutions (Marcuse 7). In *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse distinguishes between false

needs and true needs (Marcuse 7) and claims that the culture industry is just satisfying the false needs, while the true needs are silenced. The false needs, among which he includes "most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate" (Marcuse 7), are imposed on people by the ruling class, and they reinforce "toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice" (7).

By creating these false needs, Marcuse claims that the ruling class is keeping the masses under control, instituting them as the only ones able to provide satisfaction for these needs (which they created). As a result, the consumers are caught in a vicious circle, which keeps them "incapable of being autonomous, as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated" (Marcuse 8). Therefore, they are unable to distinguish between what they really want and what they are made to believe they want. Satisfying their false needs, people are made to think that they have freedom, when the only freedom that the culture industry does, indeed, give them is to choose which brand they would rather buy (brands which are actually the same), or which political party to support (political parties which, although they may sound different, are ultimately the same) (Marcuse 9).

Consequently, the culture industry turned its audience into "one-dimensional men", who seek simple pleasures and gratifications. They are unable to recognize their true needs, which have been long silenced by the cycle of indoctrination: creativity, individuality, freedom, and the ability to control their own fate (Kellner xxvii). Thus, similarly to Adorno and Horkheimer, he blames popular culture for interfering with people's individuality, and feeding them a parallel reality, which turns them blind to the real problems of their society.

The Frankfurt School's theories have been, however, heavily criticized in Postmodernism, when, along the mass society theorists, they were accused of generalizations, exaggerations, or simply not providing enough (if any) empirical evidence to support their claims. These points will be analyzed further on, when we discuss Postmodernism. For the moment, however, it is important to address Walter Benjamin's stance on popular culture as well.

Although Walter Benjamin is commonly associated with the Frankfurt School, he stands apart from the other theorists when it comes to popular culture. He does not share the others' beliefs that popular culture is inherently bad, but rather applauds the way in which mass production opens the gate for the democratization of culture. His ideas influenced Postmodernist thinkers, as theorists such as Angela McRobbie, John Storey, or Dominic Strinati often praise Walter Benjamin for his achievements. He is regarded as one of the first intellectuals who

> recognized, with some urgency, the need to extend the role of the intellectual in order to engage with the people and to do this through transforming the existing mass media while simultaneously making use of their technological advances (McRobbie 94).

In his famous essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* Walter Benjamin discusses the change in status of the work of art. According to him, traditionally, the work of art has been viewed with reverence, due to what he calls its "aura". He defines aura as "as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin 100). Thus, traditionally, the work of art involves respect on the part of the viewer, who regards the work of art as a creation of genius, or of an almost superhuman capability. This feeling of distance and awe is closely related to the ritual, Walter Benjamin goes on to say:

> We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual–first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function (100).

The art's relation to the ritual also offers authenticity to the work of art, and its comprehension as a unique, unrepeatable, and exceptional phenomenon. However, as the means of mass production develop, and it becomes easier and easier for artistic products to be reproduced, a fundamental change in the perception of art seems to take place. Walter Benjamin argues that "for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (101). He celebrates the death of the aura, and sees it as a liberation of art. Unlike Theodor Adorno, or Max Horkheimer, for whom capitalism is subjugating art, Walter Benjamin welcomes the mass production era.

Consequently, Walter Benjamin argues that precisely by losing its aura and its authenticity, art becomes available to more people, from various social categories. Art is no longer restricted to the higher class, but it is available to anyone who has the interest. However, although he commends the demystification of art, he points out that this does not mean that art is now completely free: it is no longer based on ritual, that is true, but "it begins to be based on another practice–politics" (101). The relation between art and politics will be analyzed in more detail when we discuss the ways in which popular culture empowers certain social categories.

1.3. Mass Society Theory

The Mass Society theory has very similar points to the Frankfurt theories'. Like Theodor Adorno, such theorists believe that high culture and popular culture should not be mixed and see in the culture following the Industrial Revolution a downfall of the human race in general. From the perspective of these critics, popular culture (which they identify with mass culture) is repetitive, standardized, superficial and it relies on the emotional responses of those consuming it. Therefore, according to them, mass culture poses no intellectual challenge, "discourages the effort of thinking", providing easy solutions to dealing with existential crisis, such as fantasy and escapism (Strinati 12-13). To blame for the current state of events are industrialization and urbanization, which destroyed the traditional communities and which left the modern man alone and alienated in the big city, and discredited the "mediatory organisations" such as the church and the intellectuals (Strinati 5), leaving the people without any moral guidance, prey to the manipulatory powers of mass media and popular culture. The democratizations and educational projects also had their downsides, as, in their view, they broke down the "hierarchies of taste, class, giving too much political power to the mob, tyranny of the ignorant over the minority", thus erasing the distinctions between high culture, popular culture, and folk culture (Strinati 5-7).

The negative view on mass culture was well-spread in the 19th century, as philosophers and historians such as Jakob Burckhard, Henry Adams, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Alexis de Tocqueville expressed their fears regarding the possibility of the masses overthrowing the aristocracy. De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-1840) is one of the first writings in which industry is heavily criticized, as the author voices his fears that the repetitive and monotone qualities of life in an industrialized society may overtake high culture. The capitalist culture, by turning everything into an exchange intended to generate profit, has the potential to transform writers into businessmen, who are more interested in making money and building fame, than creating something that can be appreciated by knowledgeable taste (which brings glory, but not money): "Democratic literatures always swarm with these authors who perceive in letters only an industry; and for the few great writers that one sees there, one counts vendors of ideas by the thousands" (de Tocqueville e-book). Consequently, Alexis de Tocqueville insinuates that a democratic culture cannot generate great literature.

Alexis de Tocqueville also distinguishes between two types of audiences: the aristocratic one (European and knowledgeable) and the democratic one (American and chaotic). He argues

that literature is more coherent and stable in aristocratic societies, because literary works are created according to standards and laws, and they circulate amongst people who have similar knowledge and similar views on life. These people do not have to worry about their own survival, as they are already born into wealth, and, therefore, their pleasures are more refined, allowing them to enjoy works which make them "interested, ... not carried away" (de Tocqueville e-book). Democratic audiences, on the other hand, have different levels of education. Made up of large amounts of people, who lead a "practical, contested, and monotonous" existence, these audiences require books which can instantly fill their intellectual needs (de Tocqueville e-book). Such books provide "lively and rapid emotions, sudden clarity, brilliant truths and errors that instantly pull them from themselves and introduce them suddenly, almost violently, into the midst of the subject" and they are called by de Tocqueville "facile beauties" (de Tocqueville e-book). Such books, however, do not constitute good literature.

The fear of the masses taking over is perceptible also in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche or the early 20th century intellectuals such as Ortega y Gasset, T. S. Eliot, Q.D. Leavis or F.R. Leavis. For these critics, the mass is seen in a negative light, undifferentiated, and capable of taking over the accomplishments and advances made by the elites, replacing them with its barbarous culture. Nietzsche, who was against any forms of egalitarianism, believed in a hierarchical society, ruled by the strong ones. Similarly, Ortega y Gasset, in *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), saw in the coming to power of the masses a threat to high culture, and argued that the only way in which Europe could be saved is by allowing the noble men to lead it.

Ortega y Gasset divides the society into "minorities" and "masses" (6). While minorities are viewed in a positive manner, defined as specialized groups of individuals united by a certain desire or ideal, masses are undifferentiated conglomerates of people, the "average man", "repeating in himself a generic type" (13-14). In *The Revolt of the Masses* he presents two completely opposite types of people, the nobleman and the "mass-man". The reason why Europe is declining, he claims, is because the mass-man attempts to take over the culture and impose his vulgar beliefs over the others. The mass man is defined as having the psychology of a "spoilt child", showing "ingratitude" for what was done to him, not recognizing his past, and living with the assumption that he is permitted to do anything, without any obligations (y Gasset 58). The nobleman, on the other hand, cares about more than himself: "the excellent man is urged, by interior necessity, to appeal himself to some standard beyond himself, superior to himself, whose

service he freely accepts" (63). Thus, while the nobleman is disciplined, the mass-man does whatever pleases him, without thinking about the others. It is important to note, however, that Ortega y Gasset does not overlap the nobleman with higher class and mass-man with lower class, as he emphasizes that the mass-man is "a kind of man to be found today in all social classes" (108).

The Spanish philosopher goes on to argue that as long as the mass-man knew his place in the hierarchy, the social system was "healthy", and the arts, culture, and sciences could flourish (y Gasset 12). With the masses coming to power, however, all the standards need to be lowered. He gives as an example the intellectual, who now has to keep in mind the average, uneducated, reader when he writes an essay (18). Art, politics, or even sciences, are no longer the domain of the qualified, as the masses claim to be a part of them. If previously the popular art, or "vulgar" or "barbaric", as Ortega y Gasset calls it, had "beliefs, traditions, experiences, proverbs, [or] mental habits" (70), the popular art now claims to have theories, ideas, or even scientific opinions.

However, the greatest danger of the coming to power of the masses, Ortega y Gasset asserts, is the dissolution of the State itself. The mass-man, discarding the sacrifices that were made for him to be empowered, sees the state as an extension of his self (115). He is unaware that the state functions on certain principles, and if he is dissatisfied with the way in which the state operates, the vulgar man always resorts to violence and crime. As a matter of fact, Ortega y Gasset underlines that violence is the way in which, throughout history, masses gained access to power. Since they do not have the capacity for "restrictions, standards, courtesy, indirect methods, justice, [or] reason" (75), the mass-man always relies to "direct actions": assassinations, protests or revolutions. This is the reason why, according to Ortega y Gasset, the mass-man civilization is "barbarous" (160). He sees in the fascist and bolshevik parties articulations of "a type of man who does not want to give reasons or to be right, but simply shows himself resolved to impose his opinions" (73). Such movements are "mere primitivism" in Ortega y Gasset's eyes, which have as an effect "the radical demoralisation of humanity" (125).

Similarly, T.S Eliot, in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, argues for a society ruled by superior individuals, part of the higher class. He sees culture in an organic way, divided into communities which create their own lifestyles and systems of beliefs, while are also enjoying a form of mass culture. Thus, each local culture contributes to the unity of the whole. In post-industrial societies, however, the traditional culture was destroyed by mass culture – culture is no longer transmitted hereditarily, but created by the state, uniform and monotonous (Eliot 16). This

is precisely why T. S. Eliot believes that we should protect high culture at all costs from mixing with popular culture.

Queenie Dorothy Leavis and Frank Raymond Leavis share T.S. Eliot's and Ortega y Gasset's fears concerning mass culture. In "Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture" (1930), F. R. Leavis offers a rather apocalyptical portrayal of culture in the era of mass production, as he says that "the prospects of culture, then, are very dark. There is the less room for hope in that a standardised civilisation is rapidly enveloping the whole world" (37). As he argues that culture is slowly destroyed by mechanization, he claims that the only way in which the barbarization of culture can be stopped is by allowing a "minority culture" to keep to cultural tradition intact: "upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is … only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment" (33). Q. D. Leavis, in *Fiction and the Reading Public* also notes a lowering of standards in literature, and she believes that the "cultural rot" which affects our society can only be stopped if intellectuals stand together and educate others about the real cultural and aesthetic values. Hence, intellectuals should aim to reclaim their position at the top of the social hierarchies, as legislators of the cultural taste (Q.D. Leavis 270-272).

Dwight Macdonald, in his essay "A Theory of Mass Culture" (1953), follows this line of criticism, as he firmly defines mass culture as "a parasitic, cancerous growth on High Culture" (40). Like the Frankfurt theorists, he believes that popular culture is imposed from above, and the passive consumers are only offered the illusion of choice, while the real choice is only "between buying and not buying" (40). He argues that mass culture is nothing but "a vulgarized reflection of High Culture" (41), or a "corruption of High Culture", as he states that "there is nothing more vulgar than sophisticated kitsch" (43). Thus, although mass culture stems from folk culture, it has annihilated it altogether, by trying to copy the aristocratic culture.

The rapid development of the mass culture is attributed by Dwight Macdonald to both the "ease of consumption" and "ease of production" (41). In other words, not only are the mass products easy to make, but easy to consume as well. The "ease of consumption" is a direct consequence of the infantilization of audiences, as Macdonald believes that mass culture merges child and adult audiences: while a lot of adults read comic books (which are intended for children), a lot of children have access to adult media such as the TV, radio, or magazines. He accuses popular culture of being too democratic and destroying all the values and value judgements by accepting

anything: “mass culture is very, very democratic: it absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody” (42).

Writing from a post-World War II perspective, Dwight Macdonald argues that the solution for keeping high culture intact from the negative influence of mass culture is to refuse to compete on the market. He identifies two ways in which high culture tried to defend itself from mass culture prior to 1930: “Academicism” and “Avantgardism” (42). He blames Academicism for cheapening High Culture, as he says: “Academicism is *kitsch* for the *élite*: spurious High Culture that is outwardly the real thing but actually as much a manufactured article as the cheaper cultural goods produced for the masses” (42), praising the Avantgarde for keeping high culture’s status intact. He includes in the Avantgarde writers such as James Joyce or Rimbaud, painters such as Pablo Picasso, or composers such as Stravinsky, and applauds them for distinguishing themselves from both mass culture and the Academy, by “simply refusing to compete” (42).

In the conclusion of his essay, he prophesizes a “dark future” for high culture, and an even “darker future” for mass audiences. He notes that in the 1950s America the Avantgarde is slowly dying, suffocated by the exacerbated growth of mass culture. He believes the future is dark because “the homogenization of High and Mass Culture has gone far and is going farther all the time, and there seems little reason to expect a revival of Avantgardism, that is, of a successful countermovement to Mass Culture” (45). Regarding audiences, he says they got used to mass products, which now offer comfort. Thus, they keep on asking for the same thing, and “Since Mass Culture is not an art form but a manufactured commodity, it tends always downward, toward cheapness – and so standardization – of production” (46).

1.4. Chapter Overview

Overall, in this chapter, I have defined different types of culture, emphasizing the differences between them, while also showing that a clear distinction is impossible to maintain, especially nowadays. Then, I have moved on to present the Frankfurt School's and the Mass Society theorists' views on culture, as they were the first intellectuals who witnessed the birth of a different type of culture and tried to find a way to approach it. The development of industry, mixed with the humanistic claims which followed the Enlightenment, led to a fundamental change in the social strata, which unsurprisingly unsettled the hierarchy of culture as well.

The first intellectuals to witness this, such as Alexis de Tocqueville (in America) or Friedrich Nietzsche (in Europe), regarded the new type of culture with weariness, and they feared that it may lead to social chaos and the complete loss of value. They were followed by critics who had a similar line of thought (which is why they were called "Mass Society Theorists"), such as Ortega y Gasset, T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, or Q.D. Leavis, or the Frankfurt School theorists, with the exception of Walter Benjamin.

We have looked at some of these theories in detail, concluding that for these critics the distinction between the fields of culture is regarded as fixed and stable, and maintaining this distinction is vital for keeping a society healthy. For these intellectuals, cultural production is viewed as a hierarchized field, where, because of mass production and economical gain, the lines have been blurred. The mixing of what they perceive as two entirely distinct types of culture (high culture and mass culture or popular culture) has a negative impact on the development of the society, with potentially catastrophic consequences. They both see the field of culture as going downhill, and they warn us of what may happen if we continue to allow the masses to have a voice when it comes to cultural production. Without the intellectual at the top of cultural production, these critics are afraid that non-value and cheap entertainment will take over.

We have also slightly touched upon Dwight Macdonald's views, in order to show that although the mass theorist approach is characteristic of late 19th century or early 20th century philosophers, it persisted even after the Second World War. Even today, there are still critics who support the claims of this theory, as we shall see later in this chapter, when we will also look at the way in which Postmodernism countered such beliefs.

2. Postmodernism: Erasing the Boundaries

If, towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, we note the widening of the gap between high and popular culture, in the second half of the century concepts such as "taste", or even "mass culture", become highly problematic. Postmodernist thinkers admit that the distinction between high and popular culture is gone, and that it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the two nowadays. The development of mediums such as the TV, radio or, more recently the internet, has transferred the power from the producer to the audience. Each individual has a wide range of cultural products which to choose from, as culture seems to have invaded the personal and private life of its audience. Thereupon, Dominic Strinati argues that postmodernism could easily be defined as a society "in which mass media and popular culture are the most important and the most powerful institutions, and control and shape all other types of social relationships" (Strinati 211).

Postmodernist culture is a type of culture in which, generally, popular culture is appreciated for its capacity to empower individuals, rather than turn them into faceless masses. Consequently, this chapter will look at Postmodern criticism of ideas such as *mass culture* or the death of culture, by the bringing of popular tastes into the big Culture. These critics, most notably Andreas Huyssen, Pierre Bourdieu, Angela McRobbie, Alan Swingewood, or Stuart Hall, do not see the rise of the masses as apocalyptic, and claim that, by keeping the fields of culture divided, we keep the society divided and we reinforce a cycle of domination, in which the privileged groups oppress the marginal voices. They believe that we cannot speak of popular culture as a singular type of culture, but as a conglomerate of cultures, each able to make its opinions and beliefs known to the world. Moreover, they argue that what has been understood as *high culture* is a type of culture which belonged historically to the white and rich, and which generally excluded ethnic minorities and women.

However, not everybody shares these critics' optimism regarding popular culture, and some Postmodernist theorists, such as Frederic Jameson, Harold Bloom, or Jean Baudrillard, point to the negative aspects of dismantling the distinction between high and low. Although they do admit that, in Postmodernism, the two fields are impossible to delineate, they seem to share their predecessors' fears when it comes to equalizing value or the supremacy of non-value. They speak about the loss of the real, the loss of authenticity, or the loss of tradition. Due to the fact that the

economic and the cultural sphere collided, the standards declined, and we are in danger of losing the concept of art altogether.

Thus, this chapter is going to follow this debate, emphasizing the first group of theorists' views, as we have already discussed the dangers of the popular culture in the previous chapter. Firstly, we are going to identify the origins of the *high versus low* debate, and how, historically, high culture has tried to set itself apart from what was perceived as popular culture or low culture. We will discuss the educational project of the middle class, which attempted to create a tasteful and knowledgeable culture, different from that of the bodily and of the grotesque.

After establishing the origins of the debate, we will move on and look at how Postmodernist critics, such as Lawrence Levine, Alan Swingewood, Bryan Turner, or Andreas Huyssen criticized what they claimed to be misconceptions distributed by mass society theorists or the Frankfurt School theorists. They claim that what was absorbed by the 19th century and the early 20th century modernist critics as a clear and fixed distinction between high and popular, was never actually as clear as it was presented. These critics attribute three main causes to this misconception, at which we will look in what follows: 1. The generalized understanding that, in terms of cultural consumption, *mass* is made up of mainly working-class individuals with little schooling, 2. The concept of *bread and circuses*, or the fear that the masses taking over brings along the end of Western culture altogether, similarly to what supposedly happened with the Roman Empire, and 3. A nostalgic view on life, or the belief that the contemporary society is on a downhill path, moving farther and farther away from a golden standard (see Bryan Turner, "A Note on Nostalgia", Alan Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture*, Lawrence Levine *Highbrow/Lowbrow*).

Finally, we are going to look at the way in which the Postmodern Culture, reactionary to Modernist standards, advocates for the creation of a standardless, democratic, society, which fights injustice. Thus, we are going to look at ways in which marginal groups are empowered through popular culture, and at how and why popular culture is not a type of mass culture. We are going to look in more detail at fan cultures and subcultures, as we point out their purpose in keeping the consumerist culture democratic.

2.1. The Origins of the Debate

Historically speaking, it can be acknowledged that there have always been different types of cultures, according to the social strata to which a person belonged. The aristocracy had different interests and behaviors from the peasants', and thus it was only logical for them to develop distinct cultures, in which one was clearly superior to the other (as the aristocracy was ruling over the others from a political point of view). Accordingly, the possibility of a debate between high culture and popular culture supporters could have only started when the society changed enough to allow those outside the legitimate culture to have a voice. The beginning of the debate also marks the birth of popular culture, coinciding with a time when the ruling class is forced to consider a type of culture to which it was previously indifferent. Therefore, most critics situate the emergence of modern popular culture during the Industrial Revolution (Storey 47).

The Industrial Revolution, according to Peter Burke, changed the cultural scene in multiple ways. Firstly, the relations in the job markets, between employees and employers, changed. Secondly, as masses of people were coming from the rural areas to the cities, the cities underwent fundamental changes in order to accommodate the newcomers. Finally, as a result of the French Revolution, the governments were determined to react firmly against radicalism, and thus the workers enjoyed certain freedoms and rights (Peter Burke paraphrased in Storey 13). These changes contributed to the formation of what is known today as popular culture, a democratized type of culture, which is both criticized and praised by critics.

Leo Lowenthal notes that the earliest references regarding the high versus low debate (not popular, at this point), appear in the 16th and 17th centuries. He argues that Montaigne often mentions in his work activities which should be done in "that stretch of life which is neither sleep nor work" (324), and he notices that since then there have been two dominant and opposite views on popular culture: while some praised popular culture for its ability to entertain and for the socializing opportunities it creates, others were deeply concerned "about the inner fate of individuals under the impact of the leveling powers of institutional and other organized forms of leisure activity" (Lowenthal 324). Thus, the negative effects of such popular entertainments were caused by their view as potential transgressors of the natural order, encouraging disobedience and weakening the faith the people had in the ruling class (or even more, threatening to consider themselves equal to them).

In Europe, the main forms of popular entertainment throughout the 16th and 17th centuries were carnivals and fairs. These events attracted audiences from various classes, as they were not restricted to one certain group, but allowed the participation of anyone. According to Bakhtin, they represented transgressions from the legitimate culture, celebrating excess and physical pleasure: sexual promiscuity, fattening food, intoxicating drinks (Bakhtin paraphrased in Featherstone 134). Such conducts were severely criticized not only by the clergy, who advocated for asceticism, but by the aristocracy as well, who saw in it a celebration of the grotesque and of the lower taste. Accordingly, the clash between a legitimate culture and a transgressive culture was already existent in the late Medieval and Enlightenment periods.

As the middle class was getting more and more defined, it was also attempting to distance itself from the lower classes, by developing different tastes and activities. Thus, in Europe, according to Michael Featherstone, the 16th and 17th centuries are marked by what he calls the "education project of the middle classes" (79). Through this project, the new public was taught "how to read popular cultural experiences in an aesthicized way" (Featherstone 79), which meant rather targeted the aristocracy than the lower classes. Civilizing, the main aim of this project involved an "increasing control of emotions, sense of disgust at bodily betrayals, the smells, sweating and noises of the lower body, and sensitivity to one's own bodily space" (Featherstone 79), which come in direct contraction with the carnivalesque aesthetic. Accordingly, there is an attempt to educate and discipline the tastes of the masses. As Pierre Bourdieu claims,

> the denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment, which constituted the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous pleasures (Bourdieu 7).

In other words, the middle classes were attempting to dictate their taste to the rest of the population, setting their own taste as the standard.

Consequently, throughout these centuries we note that the upper and middle classes increase their efforts in order to delimitate themselves from the lower classes and legitimize their superiority on the basis of taste. Based on the Kantian opposition between facile pleasure and pure pleasure, the culture sphere seems divided between those who are interested in keeping it pure, unmixed with everyday life elements, and those who want to use culture for practical purposes. As

Pierre Bourdieu defines it, "pure pleasure – ascetic, empty of pleasure which implies the renunciation of pleasure, pleasure purified of pleasure – is predisposed to become a symbol of moral excellence" (28). Consequently, the taste legislators do not only get to decide what is good art and bad art, but what being human actually means. The finality of the cultural debate, thus, "is nothing less than the monopoly of humanity. Art is called upon to mark the difference between humans and non-humans" (Bourdieu 499).

Having established that the low versus high debate was well defined in the 16th and 17th centuries, it is worth noting that only starting from the 18th century does popular culture distinguish itself as a distinct type of culture. Huyssen, in *After the Great Divide*, identifies the beginning of modern popular culture in the 19th century, alongside the commodification of culture, human body, and labor power, with the emergence of photography, railroads, travelling, and "industrial time" in factories, families, and schools (Huyssen 17). Modern popular culture was, thus, born at a moment when "the European bourgeoise, still fighting to secure its triumph over aristocracy and monarchy, suddenly faced the counterrevolutionary task of suppressing the workers and preventing them from openly articulating their interests" (Brenkman 101). Huyssen claims that the high versus low divide started when art became commercial, which was the only way in which it could protect its autonomy from the state or church. With art seen as a commodity, Huyssen argues that "mass culture begins to cut across classes in heretofore unknown ways", managing to attract audiences from different social classes (Huyssen 18).

The 19th century saw similar developments in America too, as Lawrence Levine argues that throughout the century, the attitude of the aristocracy towards the common people ranged from an educational ideal (at the beginning of the century), to the belief that the masses cannot be educated, and refined entertainment should be reserved for the high classes (Levine 155). During this period, a process of "sacralization" of art takes places (what Walter Benjamin called "aura"), defined as "the adoption of a single version of cultural truth, of a single model of cultural creation" (Levine 168). This is the embodiment of the need for cultural legitimacy and social order in what was perceived as a "chaotic" America, filled with immigrants and people whose need for entertainment had to be satisfied (Levine 176). Therefore, the desire to separate mass entertainment from high entertainment was expressed by the upper classes, who wished to set themselves apart from the common people.

In the 18th century, Levine shows, Americans enjoyed authors such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Mark Twain, or Longfellow, irrespective of their class (233). Shakespeare's dramas were played in theaters alongside popular entertainment such as dance, gymnastics, or folk music. However, it is important to note that Shakespeare's plays were not always presented in their original form: some passages were modified or shortened in order to be more accessible to audiences, and actors had to change lines in order to appeal to the people. Although this maneuver was common throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, not everybody enjoyed it, and many believed that Shakespeare's work should be kept intact. Thus, theaters became segregated, and two hypostases of Shakespeare can be outlined: Shakespeare as a simple man who wrote to entertain the masses, and Shakespeare the genius, put on a pedestal, who cannot be understood by simple minded people (Levine 70). Slowly, mass audiences became more and more distanced from Shakespeare, whom they were all of a sudden told that they could not understand: "Not one man in twenty thousand can read Shakespeare intelligently", claimed Mark Liddell, one of the leading critics of the time (qtd in Levine 71).

Similarly, what happened to Shakespeare, who was supposedly rescued from popular culture into high culture, happened to symphonies, opera, or orchestras as well. This process reached its peak in the beginning of the 20th century, as Lawrence Levine argues that, at that point, Shakespeare was no longer the writer of the people: "he was no longer their familiar, no longer part of their culture", and he had "become part of 'polite' culture – an essential ingredient in a complex we call, significantly, 'legitimate' theater" (Levine 31). Shakespeare, along many other writers who were popular in the 19th century, now became the possession of intellectuals, and mass audiences had very little interaction with them. Consequently, the argument that the masses could not understand or did not enjoy high entertainment, as the mass theorists claimed, is not completely accurate, since we have seen that, in fact, the masses were also denied access.

2.2. The Myth of the "Mass"

a) The Great Debate (1950s-1960s)

The debate between high and pop (also called mass) culture reached its peak in the second half of the 20th century. If the early 20th century intellectuals, led by the Frankfurt School or the mass society theorists, tended to agree on the state of culture at that time (with some exceptions, such as Walter Benjamin), after the Second World War the opinions were more divided than ever. The rapid development of the cinematic or the comic book industries, as well as a significant increase in literacy and the amount of people who owned a television set, led to heated debates regarding the impact of popular culture on its audience. Accordingly, every intellectual seemed to have something to say about the state of culture at that time. Critic Henry Rabassiere even ridiculed the importance intellectuals confer to their own theories, as he argued in his essay "In Defense of Television", that the intellectual's concern with the state of culture and mass entertainment has become, in itself, a new form of mass culture (368-372). Moreover, he hinted at the fact that the entire debate is useless, serving only to enhance the intellectuals' ego, since those who are designated as the "masses" are not actually invited to take part in the debate.

In "Mass Culture in America", Bernard Rosenberg identified three stances in regards to popular culture in the 1950s: the radicals (such as Dwight Macdonald, Clement Greenburg, or Irving Howe), the "arch-conservatives" (in particular Ortega y Gasset, T. S. Eliot, or Bernard Iddings Bell), and the liberals (who, at that time, represented the middle ground in the debate: Gilbert Seldes, David Riesman, and Max Lerner) (Rosenberg 4). While the first two groups agreed that popular culture has harmful effects on audiences, the liberals claimed that not all popular culture is bad, and that, in the right hands, popular culture has the potential to turn society into a better place.

Conservative intellectuals were mainly criticized, as hinted above, for not being able to see beyond their own ideals regarding culture. Henry Rabassiere, Leslie Fiedler, and David White claim that critics blindly criticize popular culture, based on their assumptions rather than on facts and empirical observations. As Leslie Fiedler argues in his essay, "The Middle Against Both Ends", most critics who complain about the negative effects that comic books have on the society have not even read one single comic book (538). He says that such claims are overly simplified interpretations, made by critics who are isolated in their ivory towers and refuse to put effort into

their analysis. Accordingly, they consider anything that is associated with popular culture inferior, without investing too much thought into it.

Henry Rabassiere reinforces Fiedler arguments, as he says that "all the indictments against 'mass culture' are at least as old as Gutenberg" (369). He argues that conservative critics are unable to gasp the new reality, and they are filled with nostalgia for a past they idealized. Moreover, by completely rejecting popular culture, the "would-be intellectuals alienate themselves from the sources of national experience and risk forfeiting their share in forming it" (374). Consequently, what most liberal critics argue is not that popular culture is superior in any way to high culture, but that intellectuals should get more involved in shaping it, rather than complain about the current state of events.

Gilbert Seldes, in "The People and the Arts", emphasizes this, as he says that the greatest problem in the field of culture (in the 1950s) is the "estrangement between the artist and the audience" (84). By locking traditional art away from the people, associating it with high culture and placing it in opposition with popular culture, we only allow popular culture to lower its standards more and more. Thus, the intellectual is to blame for the current state of popular culture. The solution to this, according to Seldes, is for intellectuals to take advantage of the new mediums, such as the radio and the tv, and fight the stereotypes or anti-intellectualist programs which over-saturated popular culture at that time (84).

Hence, Seldes underlines that "the truth about all popular arts" is that "you cannot, by avoiding them, escape their effect" (92). Hence, he criticizes the traditional attitudes of intellectuals who believe that, by sticking to their canons and hierarchies, they might be able to keep their tastes pure. There is no war between high culture and popular culture, and "comparison between them is useless", Seldes argues (65): the two types of culture should co-exist peacefully, and moreover, intellectuals should be more active in shaping popular culture as well.

In addition to the tendency to idealize the past, at which we are going to look further on, Leslie Fiedler believes that the main reason intellectuals react so negatively to popular culture is attributed to the realization of the "petty-bourgeois" that "his own dream, which he considers as nothing less than the final dream of humanity" was rejected by the people ("The Middle" 546). In other words, such intellectuals feel let down by the literacy project altogether: they have taught the masses to read and write in order to embrace the classics, but what happened is that they still prefer pulp magazines and comic books. According to Fiedler, this is perceived as "the betrayal of literacy

itself" ("The Middle" 541), as it seems that mass audiences prefer to read books aimed at children, with bad grammar, and very limited vocabulary, sold in supermarkets, rather than enjoy what distinguished libraries and bookstores offer them.

Leslie Fiedler also notes that the group of people who are fundamentally opposed to popular culture, although they share the same ideas and arguments, are not at all homogenous when it comes to social class or education. Thus, intellectuals, mother associations, politicians, priests, or psychologists all agree that popular culture, and comic books in particular, have a negative effect on its audiences. Leslie Fiedler believes that what brings them together is "the sense that they are all, according to their lights, righteous" and their protest "represents only one more example of the notorious failure of righteousness in matters involving art" ("The Middle" 538). Consequently, those who radically disapprove of popular culture perceive themselves as "guardians of morality of sanity" (538). Such attitudes, however, are neither new, nor would they ever stop existing. Leslie Fiedler points out that this has been the fate of everything that is now canonized, as he reminds his readers that these critics' reactions are similar to the "diatribes against the stage of the Elizabethan Era, and the pious protests against novel reading in the later eighteenth century" ("The Middle" 538). Thus, there is nothing new. The way in which culture and cultural recognition works has not changed much, although the mediums have.

All in all, we see that the critics who supported popular culture in the debate are mainly the Postmodernist critics, who refused to take for granted the traditional assumptions. We are going to look more in depth at the Postmodernist theories further on, but for the moment it is important to note that Postmodernism is defined as a type of culture who refuses to blindly trust any metanarrative, as Jean François Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition*. Thus, the Postmodernists were quick to show that most of the accusations which were brought upon popular culture were simply based on historical fallacies or over generalizations. Moreover, as we will see further on, they show that concepts such as *mass culture*, *taste*, or even *high culture* are not as clearly established as the traditional critics seem to believe.

b) Nostalgia and Idealizing the Past

As we have seen before, traditional critics tend to deplore the state of culture today: lower standards, lower quality, standardized products. They fear that people will choose those cultural products which are produced en masse, instead of what they perceive as genuine artistical creations. This belief, however, has been harshly criticized by intellectuals such as David White, Bryan Turner, Gans Herbert, Alan Swingewood, Patrick Brantlinger, Andreas Huyssen, Pierre Bourdieu, and many others. They claim that critics who believe that we are regressing as a society, particularly in terms of culture, share a distorted vision of the past, and they reinforce a historical fallacy. As David White argues in "Mass Culture in America: Another Point of View", "There never was a country in which the great thoughts of mankind, the noblest works of art, and literature, and music were accepted by all segments of population" (14). There have always been people who "preyed upon the ignorance and insecurities of the largest part of the populace" (White 14), and the fact that this is still happening today in TV and radio programs should not surprise us, as it is nothing new.

In his influential essay entitled "A Note on Nostalgia", Bryan Turner analyzes the role nostalgia plays in the development of Occidental civilizations. In his paper, he claims that aristocratic groups have always had the tendency to idealize simple lifestyles, associating rural societies with "tranquility, leisure and rural retirement" (Turner 147). Such ideas are prevalent in the writings of traditional critics, who deplore the fact that popular culture destroyed traditional communities and their folk culture (particularly T.S. Eliot or Dwight Macdonald). Thus, these critics reinforce ideas such as the fact that cultural products produced by mass-media are not genuine, and they are simply deceiving their audiences. In other words, mass culture is seen as a threat to personal authenticity and individuality, which seemed to have been very well developed before the appearance of popular culture (Turner 153).

Turner identifies four elements which contribute to the "nostalgic paradigm", and which are constant in all the criticism written against popular culture (150). Firstly, the nostalgic paradigm involves the belief that humanity is on a downside path, departing from "some golden age of 'homefulness'" (150). Secondly, the present is perceived as lacking "wholeness and moral certainty" (150). Thirdly, an erosion of "genuine social relationships" is observed, which leads to the disappearance of individuality, as well as of any meaningful social interactions (151). Finally, "the idea of a loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity" (151) is also

shared by traditional critics, who see it in the replacement of traditional festivities and celebrations with mediatized events and massified products.

For Bryan Turner, these fears, associated with the nostalgic paradigm, are nothing less than an expression of the crisis of the intellectual, who feels "homeless" in a world where everything becomes available to everybody (153). This view is not only shared by Modernist critics, but by influential figures such as Frederic Jameson and Jean Francois Baudrillard, who have frequently been accused of focusing on the negative aspects of Postmodernism, rather than on what it can achieve.

Historically speaking, Alan Swingewood shows, the aristocracy has always been against the formation of a democratic type of culture. In the 19th century, the general belief of the dominant class was that the "workers must know and accept their natural status in society" (101). This involved limited education, just enough to improve their skills as workers. However, they should not be taught about radicalism or socialism, as that would interfere with their status as obedient workers. Many bourgeois ideologists believed that education, and books in general, make the workers lazy and vain, thus leading to "idleness and cultural degradation" (Swingewood 102).

The greatest historical fallacy that Alan Swingewood addresses in his book is the concept of "mass culture" itself, in its traditional understanding as working-class culture. He shows that although "mass culture" has been criticized for lowering standards in order to satisfy mass audiences (composed of uneducated, or low educated workers mainly), there has never been such a type of culture, and mass products were still aimed at higher classes and aristocracy throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. He demonstrates in his book, *The Myth of Mass Culture*, that the education project of the middle classes was largely a failure, as he emphasizes that the average worker, working over fourteen hours a day all week in a factory, hardly had time to indulge in what the popular culture of the time was offering. Moreover, not only were libraries few in number, but the high price of books and novels made them unavailable for working-class audiences (103). Consequently, the entire concept of "working-class culture" is nothing but a "conspiracy on the part of the ruling class" to claim of "the existence of a unified and coherent policy of social and cultural integration when none existed" (Swingewood 103).

Consequently, the popular culture which developed throughout the nineteenth century "was never intended solely for the working class" (Swingewood 107). Although those belonging to the working-class were educated enough to be able to read and write, statistics show that the

amount of people actually reading popular culture, including newspapers and magazines, "was always way below the existing literacy levels" (Swingewood 105). Most of these readers belonged to the higher class, who had both the time, and the money to read. Thus, Swingewood shows, those who consumed what has been called "cheap fiction", such as pornographic novels, sentimental novels, or Gothic horror stories, were mostly "the literate upper classes" (105).

Alan Swingewood concludes that "If there is a threat to high culture, then, it stems not from the working class but from the social strata who, through voting habits, styles of life and ideological assumptions share uncritically in the values of capitalism" (107). Consequently, Swingewood goes on to argue, the reason high culture and popular/mass culture have been seen as opposite is the fact that popular culture has been wrongly accused of being the cause of a lower type of culture, quality-wise. This, however, as seen above, is not the case. The educated and the "masses" were "equal partners" in the creation of popular culture (Swingewood 109). The concept of mass culture, then, is a myth which, according to Swingewood, was a "necessary foundation for modern capitalist legitimacy" (115).

Similar to Alan Swingewood and Bryan Turner, Patrick Brantlinger also accuses the traditional critics of idealizing the past and promoting historical fallacies. He argues that the reason conservative critics fear that popular culture might bring about the end of all culture is the assumption that the "bread and circuses" brought doom upon the Roman Empire. This analogy was first developed by Romantic and decadent poets, then it was absorbed by traditional critics in the 20th century. Thus, an analogy is made between the current state of events, following the Second World War, and the fall of the Roman Empire, as it is argued that at the base of the demise of the Roman empire were the populist decisions which took over the civic duties. As McLuhan observed, the culture which developed after the Second World War is perceived as barbaric, a "new Dark Age in which civilization itself as we have known it may disappear of be confined to small Islands of archaic conservation" (McLuhan 16).

However, Brantlinger argues that this belief is simply a mythologization of history, which did not start with the Roman Empire, but much earlier. The idea of the 'mass' has been regarded negatively even in the Ancient times, as Brantlinger notes that the writings and theories of Greek and Roman philosophers contain "most of the elements in modern critiques of mass culture and mass society" (Brantlinger 53). Plato, Aristotle, and Heraclitus see in the "many" barbarism and decadence, while reinforcing the "assumption of the rarity of 'the best'" (Brantlinger 56).

Hence, conservative critics see history repeating itself, as the masses come to power. As the masses brought the end of the Roman Empire, so will they, undoubtedly, bring about the end of civilization. However, Brantlinger shows in his book, *Bread and Circuses*, that not only did the raise of the masses truly have little to do with the decline of the Roman Empire (81), but that the analogy itself is misleading. In fact, he agrees with Max Weber when he says that there is little to be learnt today from ancient Roman history:

> we can learn little or nothing for our contemporary social problems from ancient history. A modern proletarian and Roman slave would be as unable to understand one another as a European and a Chinese. Our problems are of a completely different character (Weber quoted in Brantlinger 48).

c) A Matter of Taste

The idea of taste, which is at the base of the *high versus low* debate, was also heavily criticized by Postmodernists. Traditionally, when it comes to high culture, taste represents more than simple likeness or pleasure, and it is viewed as objective and pure, while the common taste is irrelevant and subjective. A certain work of art is part of high culture because it has a set of features which cannot be comprehended properly by those who lack the taste for it. Pierre Bourdieu, like Gans Herbert, criticizes this view on taste, arguing that the concept of taste is nothing but a set of skills acquired by individuals. Moreover, people are not born with these skills (and neither does the work of art have them inherently); they are rather gained through education and upbringing, which are also strongly connected to wealth and social status. As Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Distinction*, "whereas the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education" (1). Thus, the preference for one book or another is not based on a particularity related to a superior character, but to the way in which that person was brought up and his or her education level.

Herbert Gans, as seen before, writes that the "universality of high-culture standards" cannot be proved, and it is, in fact, just a myth based on the belief that everybody shares the same aesthetic standards ("American Popular Culture" 19). In fact, everybody has different standards, but the cultural products satisfy the same needs, ultimately, for all individuals. The difference between *high* and *popular* products resides in the consumer's ability and time to read the respective work of art. Something which may be considered repetitive and boring to someone with a lot of education, who has invested substantially in learning how to decipher works of art, can bring a lot of entertainment to someone who did not have access to education and works for twelve hours a day in a factory.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that, throughout centuries, a certain "cultural nobility" was imposed on goods, which has led to a hierarchy in which some products became superior to others (3). The saying "love at first sight" does not apply in arts, he argues, as cultural goods have no value in themselves, the value lies in the eye of the beholder. Appreciating a work of art consists in "an act of cognition, a decoding operation, which implies the implementation of a cognitive acquirement, a cultural code" (3). In order to form an opinion about a cultural good, you need to have the necessary training. Thus, Bourdieu criticizes the "typically intellectualist theory of artistic perception" which tends to overlook the "acquisition" of the "eye" (3).

Bourdieu is also critical of what is traditionally called "pure gaze" in Kantian aesthetics. While pure gaze is definitory for the superior man, able to distance himself or herself from the real world and its problems, the common person judges the work of art though his or her own experience (34). Bourdieu gives as an example the way in which a trained person and a working-class member would analyze the same photograph of wrinkled hands: while the educated person would point out the general themes, such as suffering and pain, and try to situate it in relation to other works of art or artistic currents, the working-class individual would try to identify to whom the hands belong (an old woman, a worker) and think of that person's chores. Thus, for the popular taste, the work of art must be practical and linked to real life, while the "pure" taste attempts to situate it in the larger discussion of the theme.

Accordingly, Pierre Bourdieu is critical of the fact that the relation between taste, education, and wealth was overlooked by traditional critics, who only saw in the beauty of high culture the result of better education and a certain artistical predisposition, which are irrelevant of one's social status. He argues that

> To be able to play the games of culture with the playful seriousness which Plato demanded, … one has to belong to the ranks of those who have been able not necessarily to make their whole existence a sort of children's game, as artists do, but at least to maintain, for a long time, sometimes a whole lifetime, a child's relation to the world (Bourdieu 54).

In other words, to be able to distance yourself from the real, you need to have the material capital and comfort which allows you not to care too much about real life problems. The same ideas were reinforced by Lawrence Levine, as we have seen before. In *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, he showed that the creation of the high taste was the mere wish of the high and upper middle classes to distance themselves from the activities and lifestyles of the lower classes. Moreover, Stallybrass and White, in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, also demonstrate that the carnivalesque elements were considered grotesque by the classes placed higher in the ruling hierarchy. Thus, Postmodernists argue that aesthetics is not and has never been pure, as it has always been mixed with politics.

The Frankfurt School theorists, as well as the mass society theorists, based their assumptions on this clear distinction of tastes, as they argued that high culture must be protected at all costs. The Frankfurt School agenda of cutting art from everyday life is also viewed with

suspicion by Postmodernists, who accused the supporters of discriminating between social classes, and purposefully restricting access to art for those who were not part of the upper class. Dominic Strinati argues that the Frankfurt Theorists wanted to create a type of art that was so distant from reality that it could not appeal to common people and their problems (Strinati 70). Moreover, Adorno's ideal audience was composed only of the "select and enlightened few, [who] by undertaking their intellectual and cultural practices, cut themselves off from the mundane activities of the masses" (Strinati 70).

The Frankfurt School theorists were also accused of being elitists, and of not recognizing the differences between audience members, and between popular cultural products, oversimplifying their features. Bernard Gordon heavily criticized Adorno for failing to recognize the differences between types of production and for putting, for example, music, in the same category as other commercial products. He claims that Adorno does not acknowledge the important shifts taking place in music (and popular culture in general), and that he implies "that popular musical styles never change" (Gendron 32). Thus, he is criticized for reducing the popular taste to a monotonous mass when, in fact, there are always changes in the field of popular culture.

Other remarks put forth by postmodernist thinkers about Adorno's and Marcuse's theories were their failure to provide empirical evidence to support their claims. Thus, Dominic Strinati ridicules Theodor Adorno by saying that his theories perhaps could not be supported by arguments or studies because the "real listeners have regressed so far, have become so 'infantile', that nothing could be gained by studying them" (Strinati 69). Marcuse was also criticized for the same reason, as he seems to generalize the idea of the "real" needs or "real people" and claims to be an expert on what such people actually desire. Dominic Strinati notes that "people may need intellectual fulfilment, but they also need clean clothes" (Strinati 73), while Goldthorpe ironically remarks that maybe Marcuse should be reminded that "a washing machine is a washing machine is a washing machine" (Goldthorpe 184). The true needs, Strinati claims, are built on a model which is based on the lifestyle of the elite intellectual, and he accuses the Frankfurt School theorists for claiming to know "what people should and should not be doing on basis of their own ideological preferences" (Strinati 74).

2.3. The Postmodernist Society. Empowerment and Popular Culture

a) Against Modernism

As we have seen above, the 1950s are marked by heated debates regarding the distinction between high and low culture. Traditionalist critics, which represented the majority at the time, agreed that this distinction must be held, as it represents the last line of defense against the manipulation and infantilization of audiences performed by the mass media. Popular culture and mass media were generally seen in a negative light, as forces which may lead to the destruction of civilization itself. Although these ideas were widely spread by post-war critics, most of them belong to the Frankfurt School theorists, who voiced the same concerns at the beginning of the century.

Consequently, the new type of culture which develops throughout the 1960s, Postmodernism, appears to be fundamentally opposed to Modernist culture, to its standards and value hierarchies. For the first time, popular culture is celebrated in Postmodernism, and popular genres such as detective stories, science fiction, or horror stories not only make their way into the academia, but their methods are frequently employed by writers in award-winning novels. We will talk more about this in the following chapter. For the moment, we shall focus on the way in which Postmodernists try to set themselves apart from their predecessors and use popular culture in order to empower rather than create difference.

Andreas Huyssen, whose study, *Against the Great Divide*, represents the most eloquent Postmodernist case against the distinction between high culture and low culture, and which we are going to refer to more in this chapter, argues that modernism has often been described as "elitist, arrogant and mystifying master-code of bourgeois culture" (Huyssen 16-17). However, he points out that this is a rather distorted view on Modernism, and a consequence of its canonization in the 1950s. In other words, in their crusade to establish a hierarchy of tastes, the critics ossified the great Modernist artists in museums and in the academia, when, in fact, most Modernist artists were opposed to such practices. Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* is a perfect example in this situation, as his masterpiece ironically became exactly what it struggled not to be: just another exhibit in a museum. By canonizing the Modernist artists, John Storey further on argues that the Modernist movement was drained of all its "subversive power" (Storey 182).

Instead of shocking or provoking outrage, the works of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Picasso, or Brecht are sanctified parts of the canon. Susan Sontag, one of the most influential critics of the time, argues that the status change of Modernism is what leads to the creation of Postmodernism. In other words, she defines cultural Postmodernism as a "a new sensibility in revolt against the canonization of modernism's avant-garde revolution" (Sontag paraphrased in Storey 182). Andreas Huyssen also emphasizes that the problem is not Modernism itself, but the way in which Modernist works of art were put on a pedestal, sanctified, and made intangible. Thus, while nobody denies the value of the great works of art produced by Modernism, the problem arises when "their greatness is used as unsurpassable model and appealed to in order to stifle contemporary artistic production" (Huyssen 205).

Moreover, Frederic Jameson also points out that the emergence of Postmodernism was only made possible because

> the younger generation of the 1960s will now confront the formerly oppositional modern movement as a set of dead classics, which 'weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living', as Marx once said in a different context (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 4).

Those who praise the "sterile" high modernist dogma, Andreas Huyssen further on argues, become blind to the new advances in the field of culture and reduce all pop culture to an inferior, undifferentiated type of culture which cannot produce anything worthwhile (Huyssen ix). Huyssen also emphasizes that in Postmodernism the lines are blurred, and artists and popular culture often influence each other: while many artists seek to salvage elements of popular culture, as they "incorporate mass cultural forms into their work", "certain segments of mass culture have increasingly adopted strategies from the high" (Huyssen ix).

The modernist culture was a culture which, as Theodor Adorno insisted, tried to keep its distance from popular culture. As Andreas Huyssen observed, "the traditional way in which art and literature were produced, disseminated, and received, is never challenged by modernism but maintained intact" (Huyssen 163). Consequently, most modernists critics, like T. S. Eliot and Ortega y Gasset, emphasized the role of the intellectual in defending high art from the attacks coming from the part of popular culture. The audiences of modernist culture were made up of intellectuals, as Habermas argues that "bourgeois art" (or Modernist art) had two main expectations from its audience: firstly, they were supposed to become experts in order to truly

enjoy the art, and secondly, they should behave "as a competent consumer who uses art and relates aesthetic experiences to his own life problems" (Habermas 11-12). Therefore, the appreciation of high art seems to be denied for the masses, who lack the adequate skills.

The Postmodernists, like the Frankfurt School theoreticians before them, questioned the Enlightenment's ideals, arguing that they are incompatible with the way in which society developed. Although critics such as Jurgen Habermas claim that our purpose should be to continue to project of Enlightenment, which was carried on by Modernists, and spread its values, which are the access to education and the general education of the masses (Habermas 8), Andreas Huyssen argues that such views are outdated and they would never work in the modern world. Moreover, he claims that Habermas' vision is both "questionable" and "undesirable" (175). He points out that Enlightenment was a double-edged sword, as its ideals of rationality and progress were often accompanied by a totalizing view and universal values (Huyssen 175). Thus, Enlightenment did not do much to recognize difference, and this would not work very well with the decentered identities that are supported by Postmodernism. It is precisely the issue of "otherness" which destabilized the "imperialist" enlightened culture, Huyssen argues (219).

It is important to note, at this point, that the Postmodernists are not the first who tried to erase the distinction between high culture and popular culture. There have been various movements which tried to do so throughout history, but most of them remained largely unsuccessful. A lot of Modernist movements, in particular the Avant-garde, had similar intentions: through their artwork they attempted to close the gap between art and audience, and make sure that all social classes have unrestricted access to art. Many times, Avant-gardist artists showcased their work on the streets, on television, or simply for free, in order to destabilize the rigid rules of the museum and of the academia. Thus, I think it is important to point out how and why the avant-garde failed, in order to better understand why Postmodernism succeeded.

The concept of avant-garde, as Andreas Huyssen shows, has not only been linked to art, but to political activism as well (4), pointing back to Henri de Saint Simon's view on the artist as the creator of the new world, involved in the political and social development of the world (Huyssen 4). Thus, contrary to Frankfurt School's view or to that of the high Modernists, the avantgarde wanted art to be involved in day-to-day life, and turned into a tool for social change. Huyssen argues that the main aim of the avantgarde was to "demystify and to undermine the legitimizing discourse of high art in European society" (Huyssen 192); in other words, the

avantgarde was an anti-elitist movement. Walter Benjamin himself praised the avantgarde (especially Dada) for destroying the art's "aura" of originality and uniqueness (Benjamin 99).

With regard to technology, while most of the modernist critics believed that it had a negative impact on culture, destroying the uniqueness of the work of art, and replacing it with serial production, the avant-gardists celebrated most of the technological innovations. Although they recognized its potential to turn people into faceless machines, most of the avant-garde movements tried to integrate elements such as the machine or the factory into their works. They recognized technology's ability to demystify the work of art, and make it more connected with the real world and real problems of the time. Thus, we often see avant-gardists using unconventional materials in their sculptures, which are associated with industrial work, such as screws or wires, as well as depictions of factories in paintings or texts. By integrating technology into art, Huyssen argues that technology was liberated "from its instrumental aspects" (Huyssen 11). In other words, technology and industrialism were no longer presented as incompatible with art; they could very well serve as inspiration for artists, becoming themes in their compositions.

However, the avant-gardists did not manage to change the face of art. Although their controversial works of art stirred many reactions at the moment of their emergence, by the time the Second World War started, it had already vanished from Europe. Not only did it disappear, but the entire movement was canonized and included in museums after the war. There were exhibitions in museums with avant-garde art, and avant-gardist writers were included in the official literary canon. Thus, the avant-garde failed, turning into exactly the type of culture it was fighting against. Not only did they fail in their attempt to destroy art's aura, but they also failed to change the society and make the world better (although some might argue that they succeeded). Both in Russia and in Germany the avant-garde became an ideological tool in the hands of the Communist, respectively the Fascist party. Thus, by becoming an official doctrine, the avant-garde was liquidated.

All in all, the avant-garde does not seem to have influenced much the debates regarding the *high versus low* dichotomy in the 1950s. Its members' ideals and goals were buried under ideological propaganda, and after the Second World War there were little chances of its restoration, at least not in Europe. It may be said, however, that the avant-garde succeeded in a way that was never their intention: "in the fascist aestheticization of politics as mass spectacle as well as in the fictionalizations of reality dictated by the social realism of Zhadanov and by the dream world of

capitalist realism promoted by Hollywood" (Huyssen 34). However, this was not the avant-garde's ideal, and their mission will be explored in the 1960s by Postmodernists and Pop Artists.

b) The New Avant-garde. The Integration of Art in Everyday Life

As we have seen above, the avant-garde was largely unsuccessful. However, where the avantgarde failed, the Postmodernists succeeded. The postmodernist society, which developed mostly in the 1960s, is one in which culture is no longer high or low, but wherein cultural products are varied, able to satisfy a large array of tastes.

The transformation in the sphere of culture happened due to a series of events which occurred after the Second World War. As Herbert Gans points out in *Popular Culture and High Culture*, the reasons which allowed the distinction to be erased are related to the changes which took place in the 1960s. Firstly, education became broader, and universities accepted students from various social groups, and even youths without college educated parents were able to attend higher education. Secondly, as opposed to what the traditional critics thought it may happen, advertisers and television entrepreneurs directed their attention towards the middle and upper-middle classes, and tried to come up with products which would satisfy their tastes, not that of the lower classes, which did not have the capital to enjoy it. Thus, the lower classes had to adapt and educate themselves in order to properly understand the new type of entertainment. Thirdly, the counterculture of the 1960s, which rebelled against earlier generations, also helped shape the new type of culture. Many of the rich white youth, from good families, rebelled against their parents and attended rock concerts and other types of entertainment destined to the middle classes. Finally, connected to the third point, Gans also notes what he calls the "decline in intergenerational obligations", meaning that people were free to choose whatever they want from culture, irrelevant of their social class (Gans, *Popular Culture* 27-30).

An important part in cultivating those changes is attributed by Andreas Huyssen to Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism, which he sees as resurrections of the avant-garde in the United States (Huyssen 167-168). Thus, although the avant-garde failed in Europe, over the ocean it flourished after the Second World War. The reasons for this may be ascribed to the fact that the first avant-garde wave of the 1920s did not achieve the same level of notoriety in America as it did in Europe. While the avant-garde was already familiar to most Europeans, in America it had a sense of novelty. Moreover, Andreas Huyssen points out, the United States did not have a well-established and homogenous institutional art up until the 1950s, thus the avant-gardists could not rebel against something which did not exist. In other words, the avantgarde would not have made sense in the United States in the 1920s because, as Huyssen claims, "high art was still struggling hard to gain

wider legitimacy and be taken seriously by the public" (Huyssen 167). American modernist writers such as William Faulkner, Henry James, or Ernest Hemingway were more concerned with creating a constructive discourse of the high culture, and an American literary identity, rather than with fighting against traditional and bourgeois art.

Much like the historical avantgarde, in the 1960s many artists tried to erase the distinctions between art and everyday life. There was an emphasis on performance art, bodily art, and happenings, types of art which could not be enclosed in a museum or in more traditional spaces. Artists such as the Viennese actionists (Hermann Nitsch, Gunter Bross, or Otto Muehl), or Chris Burden used violent and shocking techniques, mostly involving their bodies, in order to make their ideas heard. Christ Burden's performances, such as *Shoot, B.C. Mexico*, or *Trans-Fixed* criticized capitalist greed and the constant need for entertainment, as Chris Burden set himself on a journey which challenged the line between life and death. To name a few of his acts in the name of art: he got shot, he survived for eleven days on a beach with no food, and he crucified himself on top of his Volkswagen (in *Trans-Fixed*, probably his best-known performance). Happenings were another way in which young artists tried to make their voice heard through shock. Such events usually involved tearing down the wall between artist and audience, as the audience members would often collaborate with the artist in order to make the artistic act successful. Artists such as Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Wolf Vostell, and later Yoko Ono and the Fluxus movement, as well as Marina Abramovic, put their audience in uncomfortable positions, which forced them to question various aspects of society.

Once again, art proved to be political. The rebel artists mentioned above had no interest in keeping art pure, as Adorno insisted before the Second World War. Moreover, the type of culture which dominated the 1960s was often called "counterculture" or "protest culture", specifically for its belief in the power of civil society to change things. This period is marked by political instability, as anti-war movements, civil rights movements, feminist and many other types of groups try to make their voices heard and fight for legislative changes. Artists refuse to lock themselves in ivory towers and take the fight to the streets. Art is seen as a tool for social change. As Andreas Huyssen summarizes, "the attack on the institution art was always also an attack on hegemonic social institutions" (193). Thus, the avant-garde which developed in the 1960s through counterculture sees canonized art as an appendix of power for those who are at the top of the social hierarchy. Consequently, if the modernists feared that mass media, through popular culture, will

attempt to control audiences and create a standardized culture, in the 1960s high culture is seen as the feared repository of bias and restraint.

Pop art is probably one of the most important movements which contributed to the coming of Postmodernism. Through pop art, popular culture is celebrated not only on the streets but in the museum as well. Artists are openly using popular items or genres in their works, such as comics or mass-produced day to day objects (soup cans, for example). Andreas Huyssen even argues that pop art "became the synonym for the new lifestyle of the younger generation, a life style which rebelled against authority and sought liberation from the norms of existing society" (Huyssen 141). The gravity of the canon was opposed with a new playfulness in art, and most of the art styles which developed did not take themselves seriously. Pop, Huyssen claims, made "art profane, concrete and suitable for mass reception" (Huyssen 143). Not only was the new art opening itself to audiences, but high art was also made more accessible to larger audiences, as Huyssen states that "pop seemed to liberate high art from the isolation in which it had been kept in bourgeois society" (Huyssen 143).

Although pop art became very popular throughout the United States, many seemed to fear that this is the end of art as we know it. In addition to making art more democratic, Andreas Huyssen points out that many times it seemed like acclaimed pop artists, such as Andy Warhol, mindlessly succumbed to the capitalist mode of production (142). For example, oftentimes in interviews, Andy Warhol would speak about the future of art and how, through standardization, we create beauty:

> W: Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. I think everybody should be a machine. I think everybody should like everybody.
> I: Is that what Pop Art is about?
> W: Yes. It's liking things (Andy Warhol interview by Gene Swenson).

Consequently, Huyssen criticizes Warhol's obsession for standardization, claiming that it goes against the Postmodernist emphasis on individuality and self-liberation.

Traditional critics often accused Postmodern artists and critics of being populist rather than fighting for what is right. Cultural populism is defined, according to Jim McGuigan, as "the intellectual assumption, made by some students of popular culture, that the symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are more important analytically and politically than Culture with

a capital C" (McGuigan 4). Accordingly, for many intellectuals, such as the Berlin SDS collective, by succumbing to populism we renounce art altogether. Art and literature are no longer possible, as they cannot be more than a simple commodity. In contrast to traditionalist critics such as Dwight Macdonald, the SDS Collective sees both popular culture and high culture as failures, incapable of creating art: while pop culture, with its standardized products, brainwashes audiences, high culture is just a tool in the hands of the elite to maintain their dominance (Huyssen 150-152).

Overall, all these changes in the 1960s led to the creation of what appeared to be a more democratic society. According to Andreas Huyssen, only starting from the 1970s can we speak of a "genuinely postmodern and post-avantgarde culture" (195). The distinction between high culture and popular culture becomes irrelevant, and in the 1970s everything which previously seemed outrageous, or shocking, is part of the main culture. Shock itself, which the avant-gardists believed to have the power to "alter the psyche of the recipient of art" (Tretyakov qtd in Huyssen 14), and which was repeatedly employed by performance artists in their events and happenings, got absorbed by popular culture. In Postmodernism, shock does not change the mode of perception, but rather "reaffirms" it (Huyssem 15). Therefore, Postmodern culture lost its ability to properly shock its audience, which can be seen in the proliferation of horror movies, video games, or outrageous exhibitions, ferociously consumed by audiences in order to be entertained. Thus, art is finally integrated in the day to day routine.

However, in addition to the artists, the "new cultural intermediaries", as Pierre Bourdieu calls them, also contributed to the integration of art in the day to day routine. Bourdieu defines them as a group of people, usually autodidacts, who promote the intellectual lifestyle to larger audiences. They are fascinated by lifestyle, identity, and are always in search of new experiences (Bourdieu 91). By profession journalists or teachers, they refuse to be classified as either high or popular, and they focus their efforts into legitimating "new fields such as sport, fashion, popular music and popular culture as valid fields of intellectual analysis" (Featherstone 44). Pierre Bourdieu argues that the new cultural intermediaries

> easily borrowed aspects of the intellectual life-style, liberated manners, cosmetic or sartorial outrages, emancipated poses and postures and systematically apply[ed] the cultivated disposition to not-yet-legitimate culture (cinema, strip cartoons, the underground), to everyday life (street art), the personal sphere (sexuality, cosmetics, child-rearing, leisure) and the existential (the relation to nature, love, death) (Bourdieu 370).

In other words, they became the perfect audience, and worked towards creating the perfect consumer, sharing their expertise on home design, fashion, or reading lists.

Art became a business, a career-choice rather than a calling. As Benjamin Franklin proclaimed at the beginning of the 20th century, art has lost its "aura". In Postmodernism, more than ever, art is no longer linked to genius or divinity. Everybody can become an artist, and everybody interested is capable of learning the necessary skills. Moreover, artists such as Andy Warhol, or Elvis Presley achieved celebrity status world-wide. As Michael Featherstone points out, in the transition from Modernism to Postmodernism, the "oppositional and austere indecipherability of artworks were displaced" (106). Accordingly, by making art more accessible, mass audiences came to perceive the artist as an appealing persona, and his or her lifestyle as something interesting. The various documentaries and programs about artists and their lifestyles (often not even connected to the artistic product) are proof of the shifting interest of postmodernist audiences in the artist as a creator of lifestyles.

Postmodernist audiences are concerned with creating expressive lifestyles, as they become able to choose from a large variety of styles and colors regarding almost every aspect of their life. As Featherstone claims, consumer culture encourages

> individuals to adopt a non-utilitarian attitude towards commodities and carefully choose, arrange, adapt and display goods … to make a particular style statement which expresses the individuality of the owner (Featherstone 112).

Subsequently, the goods become an extension of an individual's persona and his or her life views. Traditionally, Pierre Bourdieu argues, this practice was reserved for the higher classes and intellectuals only. While the upper class enjoyed varied items through which they asserted their difference from the masses, the wide population had no interest in the aesthetics of the item, and simply cared about its functionality (Bourdieu 371).

c) The Postmodernism Society. Empowerment through Culture. Subcultures

As we have seen above, in the 1950s and 1960s, culture entered a new phase, which paved the way for the total democratization of culture. The "Great Divide", as Andreas Huyssen called it, becomes mostly irrelevant by 1970. Although the distinction is still held in high regard by conservative critics, and the direction in which culture is going is seen in apocalyptic fashion by various intellectuals, discriminating between high and popular is largely a thing of the past. Most Postmodernist critics are concerned with ensuring that culture remains a democratic field of battle, in which meanings and hierarchies are constantly challenged. In the following paragraphs we will outline some of the most prominent Postmodernist figures and their takes on popular culture. We will also look at the Postmodern society and the ways in which marginal identities are empowered trough culture.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, we witness the expansion of the culture industry: movies, music, mass entertainment. Although the culture industry was becoming more and more varied and inclusive, many Postmodern theoreticians, such as Frederic Jameson or Jean Francois Baudrillard, criticized Postmodernism for its superficiality and emphasis on capitalism and consumerism. It is worth mentioning that even though some critics criticized Postmodernity, they still recognized the fact that the distinction between high and popular culture is, if not gone, at least irrelevant. Consequently, as opposed to the Modernist critics, who warned us about what might happen if we get there, Postmodernist critics simply acknowledge a status quo.

In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson openly criticizes the commodification of culture in Postmodernism. Although he points out that this process did not start with Postmodernism, it is in this period that this status of culture is celebrated. He argues that "in postmodern culture, 'culture' has become a product in its own right" (Jameson X). While "modernism was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself", "Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (Jameson X). Consequently, Jameson claims that the postmodernists' fascination for elements from the lower culture, such as pulp fiction, kitsch, B-grade Hollywood movies, or advertisements is no longer simply "quoted", which was a Modernist technique, but these elements are incorporated into the "very substance" of Postmodernism (Jameson X).

Hence, Jameson argues that Postmodernism has abandoned at least four depth models, as the distinction between the following concepts has become irrelevant: essence and appearance,

latent and manifest, authenticity and inauthenticity, and signified and signifier (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 12). These depth models have been replaced by postmodernists with surfaces, and for this reason Jameson believes that postmodern works display a "new kind of flatness or depthlessness" (*Postmodernism* 9), which makes originality no longer possible. Originality has been replaced by pastiche or imitation, as "the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture" (18). Moreover, he believes that the loss of the depth models also caused the postmodern identity to be schizophrenic, decentered, and fragmented, lacking unity (*Postmodernism* 413).

Accordingly, Frederic Jameson argues that the only truly authentic cultural products are possible in communities in which commodification process has not taken over, such as those works produced by the "marginal pockets of the social life of the world system: black literature and blues, British working-class rock, women's literature, gay literature, the *roman quebecois*, the literature of the Third World" (Jameson, "Reification" 126). Everything else, he argues, like the Frankfurt School intellectuals before, is repetitive and standardized to please the "the atomized or serial public" who "wants to see the same thing over and over again" (Jameson, "Reification" 126).

Similarly, in *Simulation and Simulacra*, Jean Francois Baudrillard argues that culture, in its traditional understanding, is no longer possible in the postmodern world. The reason for that is that we have lost the ability to distinguish between "true and false, between 'produced' and the authentic" (Baudrillard e-book). Postmodernism is called by Baudrillard "the era of simulation", an era which witnessed the "liquidation of all referentials" (Baudrillard e-book). Not only have we lost all referentials, but we have replaced them artificially, within a sign system which has led to the abolition of the distinction between real and simulation. In other words, we substitute "the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard e-book). Hence, culture is no longer possible because we are unable to produce authentic cultural products: everything can be replicated over and over, and we no longer have an issue with this constant duplication. Thus, Baudrillard agrees with Jameson, as they both claim that originality and authenticity are no longer relevant in the postmodern world.

Baudrillard also deplores the commodification of culture, as he indicates that the postmodern museum is the equivalent of the hypermarket. While Postmodernism made culture more democratic, Baudrillard argues that it is not culture itself which became accessible to large

audiences, but the simulation of culture. He argues that when the masses go and visit museums, they do not do it because they are actually interested in the exhibitions, but because "for the first time they have the opportunity to participate in this great mourning of culture that, in the end, they have always detested" (Baudrillard e-book). Ergo, Culture, or high culture, is dead, and there is no way in which it can be resurrected. The only purpose of the museum in Postmodernism is to "keep up the humanist fiction of culture", as a reminder of the culture that used to exist (Baudrillard e-book).

Although Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard describe the blending of culture and consumerism in negative terms, for most Postmodernist critics this is precisely what allowed the empowerment of marginal voices and identities. As the market becomes more and more sophisticated, so do the audiences. For a Postmodern work of art to be appreciated, though, traditional values such as aesthetics, or literary and philosophical values are not enough anymore. As Adam Katz notes, the social efficacy of a work of art becomes more important than the "inherent" traditional values mentioned above (Katz 35). Consequently, the commodification of culture allows previously silenced voices to come to surface. As Katz underlines, groups or classes which were previously excluded from the economic, politic, and cultural field are now not only included in "the capitalist order", but their struggle conditions are also eased (Katz 55). Thus, "these categories take on a new meaning, representing the demand that outmoded forms of authority be eliminated in the interest of democratizing all social relations" (Katz 55).

Angela McRobbie, one of the most influential Postmodernist feminist critics is also critical of Jameson and Baudrillard, as she considers their theories on Postmodernism "totalizing and all-immersing", as they do not take into account the "new associations and resistances which have come into prominence by the way of these processes in the last fifteen years" (McRobbie 20). Accordingly, she argues that the two critics only superficially analyze consumerist patterns, and they present the commodification of culture in a simplistic way (25). Although, as we have seen above, Jameson praises the marginal communities for creating authentic artistic works, and evading the consumerist approach, Angela McRobbie underlines that this is, in fact, an effect of the commodification of culture. In other words, it is the free market which "offers opportunities for new emergent identities" (McRobbie 50), not the evasion from it. Moreover, as John Fiske argues,

> the commodities produced and distributed by the culture industries that are made into popular culture are those that get out of control, that become undisciplined … The economic needs of the industries can be met only if the people choose their commodities as adequate resources for popular culture … and they will only choose those texts that offer possibilities to resist, evade, or scandalize it [hemegony] (Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* 104-105).

Consequently, Fiske argues that in order for popular products to become successful, they need to escape hegemony (which, in this respect, is represented by high culture).

McRobbie also accuses Jameson and Baudrillard of crafting "catastrophe scenarios" (McRobbie 2), as she argues that what they perceive as fragmented, schizophrenic, or superficial is precisely what allowed the empowerment of marginal voices. Thus, she says:

> The obvious question to as is which social subjects have had the privilege of being whole, or 'healthy', and thus fully inscribed in history and culture? Who have been able to represent the voice of their generation in culture? Who have been the spokesmen and spokeswomen of their society? To lament the decline of full wholesome subjectivity is literally to cast aspersions on wholesome, un(in)formed, partial and hybridic identities (McRobbie 4).

Subsequently, she argues that the only type of identity which has been unabridged and wholesome throughout history is the white Christian male one (at least in Western societies). All the other silenced identities were fragmented and lacking. Thus, those who perceive Postmodernism as discontinuous and schizophrenic are those for whom history has provided a clear, stable identity. In other words, it is better for all identities to be fragmented, rather than one serving as the standard.

c) Subcultures

The fragmentation of identities is accompanied by the fragmentation and diversity of audiences. Hence, rather than grouping all the consumers of popular culture in one, vast, mass, in Postmodernism there are products for each taste. Herbert Gans notes three important changes which happened in Postmodernism in the field of culture. First, he notes the transformation of counterculture into conventional culture. Thus, what seemed shocking in the 1950s and 1960s, starting with the 1980s is part of the consumerist culture (such as rock concerts, men with long hair, short dresses etc). Secondly, he notes that the television offers more variety than ever, and even "commercial television is today far more sophisticated" that it has ever been. He argues that the movies have more complex plots, and that the amount of stereotypes and racism in popular culture has decreased drastically (Gans, "American Popular Culture" 25). Thirdly, Gans notes the emergence of a middle culture taste, which blends upper middle culture tastes with lower middle culture tastes. This new class of "yuppies" (young urban professionals) is represented by those who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s and attended universities. In their work, they mix high culture and popular culture (for example, by releasing magazines in which they review both high culture novels and rock concerts) (Gans, "American Popular Culture" 26).

At this point, it is important to mention the development of two special types of audiences: the fans and the subcultures. Fans, defined as passionate admirers of a certain cultural product or artist/celebrity, have been traditionally pathologized or ridiculed by conventional culture. As Joli Jenson points out, "the literature of fandom is haunted by images of deviance" (9), and fans are usually divided into two categories: either the hysterical female crowd, or the obsessed male individual (Jenson 9). The reason for the negative way in which fans are perceived has to do with the way in which different audiences display their appreciation of a cultural object.

Thus, as John Storey observers, the way in which fans show their appreciation for their favorite band or their favorite novel is opposed to the distanced and controlled manner in which intellectuals display their admiration for high culture (Storey 223). Moreover, this leads to an attitude in which fans are presented as "the dangerous others of modern life. 'We' are sane and respectable; 'they' are either obsessed or hysterical" (Storey 223). Although even high culture can have its own fans, as Joli Jensen shows that it is possible to be a fan of James Joyce, similarly to the way in which it is possible to be a Barry Manilow fan (Jensen 19-20), fandom has generally been attributed negative connotations.

Postmodernist critics, such as Joli Jensen or Henry Jenkins, countered the assumption that fan cultures are superficial and simply overly-attached to one cultural object or another, as they show in their studies that fans actually represent alternative critical institutions to the high cultural ones. For Henry Jenkins, "organized fandom is first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism" (Jenkins 36). Accordingly, fans are not simply passive members of the general audience, but they are creators as well. Through re-writings, avid debates, or re-readings, fans participate in the production and circulation of meaning. More than that, they augment the initial meaning of a text, becoming creators themselves (Jenkins 62).

Consequently, fan cultures are distinct parts of popular culture which, arguably, stand against mass consumer culture. As Jenkins argues in *Textual Poachers*, fan culture is an alternative space which is "defined by its refusal of mundane values and practices … Fandom's very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture" (Jenkins 283). Thus, fans set themselves apart by refusing to be part of the passive consumers, as they actively engage with the cultural object they admire. However, although fan cultures are opposed to mass consumer audiences, they are still a consumerist type of culture, which produces goods meant to circulate only in the respective groups, such as posters, band T-shirts, bracelet, or various other merchandise.

Often fans organize themselves in subcultures, which are defined by John Storey as "youth in resistance, actively refusing to conform to the passive commercial taste of the majority of youth" (226). Furthermore, Dick Hebdige, one of the most influential critics of subcultures, compares them with "noises", as he says that subcultures represent "interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media" ("Subculture" 355). In other words, subcultures represent instances meant to destabilize the attack of the mainstream media. Hebdige goes on to say that subcultures are a "mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation" ("Subculture" 355).

Dick Hebdige, in his monumental study *Subculture. The Meaning of Style* goes over the various ways in which consumerism and style work in order to shape a subculture. Thus, he argues that subcultures challenge authority through style (*Subculture* 17), as "commodities are indeed open to a double infliction: to 'illegitimate' as well as 'legitimate' uses" (Hebdige, *Subculture* 18). Accordingly, commodities such as pins, a certain type of shoes, or jackets, "'stolen' by subordinated groups are made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form

of resistance to the order" (*Subculture* 18). Through these signs, the hegemony is disturbed, as the vast majority of consumers see those signs as insulting or displeasing. As Hebdige underlines, the gestures and styles of the subculture are especially directed towards the "silent" and passive majority, which they aim to offend, and thus challenge "the principle of unity and cohesion" on which the conventional communities rely (Hebdige, *Subculture* 18).

Hebdige notes that often the artists which were promoted by a certain subculture were not openly interested in the message that subculture was sending. Dick Hebdige gives David Bowie as an example, as he says that although Bowie build his entire career on the premises of the "avoidance of the 'real world'" (*Subculture* 61), in the end he was made responsible for "opening up questions of sexual identity which had previously been repressed, ignored, or merely hinted at in rock and youth culture" (*Subculture* 61). The "Bowie cult", as Hebdige calls it, came to become "a space where an alternate identity could be discovered and expressed" (*Subculture* 88-89). Therefore, this subculture set itself apart from the parent, traditional culture, but it did not define itself according to class. It was rather articulated around questions regarding gender and sexual orientation. As Hebdige shows,

> the "Bowie-ites … were simultaneously (1) challenging the traditional working-class puritanism so firmly embedded in their parent culture, (2) resisting the way in which this puritanism was being made to signify working class in the media and (3) adapting images, styles and ideologies made available elsewhere on television and in films … in order to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness. They were, in short, challenging at a symbolic level the 'inevitability', the 'naturalness' of class and gender stereotypes" (Hebdige, *Subculture* 88-89)

In addition to the Bowie subculture, other subcultures, such as the punk one, or the gothic one, attempted to set themselves apart from mainstream audiences, as they fought against stereotypes, norms, or "taken-for-granted landscapes" (Hebdige, *Subculture* 17).

Subsequently, subcultures and fandoms are organizations inside the popular culture which fight against popular culture, by attempting to destabilize the dominant narrative. However, eventually, even these confrontational subcultures are absorbed by the main culture. According to Dick Hebdige, there are two ways in which this happens: either through the "conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form)" or

through “labelling and re-definition of deviant behavior by the dominant groups – the police, the media, the judiciary (i.e. the ideological form)” (Hebdige, “Subculture” 356). Although for Dick Hebdige this is perceived as a failure of the subculture, as he says that “eventually, the mods, the punks, the glitter rockers can be incorporated, brought back into the line” (“Subculture” 356), it can also be perceived as a success because they ultimately managed to influence the general path of culture. While some subcultures disappear, others appear, and in this way the popular culture environment remains an active site of battle where meanings are constantly challenged and remodeled.

It is worth mentioning that in England, most of the subcultures which developed held American lifestyles in high regard, as a model of freedom and individuality. America did not seem to have the same dull and conservative suburbs as London, and the British youth imagined American life filled with diversity and color. This attitude is visible in a letter David Bowie sent in 1967 to one of his first American fans, a person named “Sandra”. In the letter he says:

> I hope one day to get to America. My manager tells me lots about it as he has been there many times with other acts he manages. I was watching an old film on TV the other night called “No Down Payment” a great film, but rather depressing if it is a true reflection of The American Way Of Life. However, shortly after that they showed a documentary about Robert Frost the American poet, filmed mainly at his home in Vermont, and that evened the score. I am sure that that is nearer the real America (Sandra Adams, *My Letter from David Bowie*).

Like many other British youngsters at that time, Bowie chose to believe the idealized version of the American society: when he had to choose between two movies, one dealing with alcoholism and infidelity, and the other with the life of a great poet, Bowie chose to believe that the latter displays the truth. Moreover, David Buckley, Bowie’s biographer, shows in *Strange Fascination* that young Bowie was fascinated by all that American culture represented: rock 'n' roll and pop art, Elvis and Andy Warhol, Hollywood and Texan cowboys. When Buckley describes Bowie’s and his brother’s, Terry, views on America and Americana, he describes, in fact, the view of most British youth: “Terry would talk to his brother about his love for the Beat poets, Kerouac and Ginsberg, and would frequent jazz cellars of an evening and tell tales of the thrill and excitement of modern jazz in the metropolis” (17).

This fascination for Americana in the British society was negatively perceived by nationalistic critics, who feared that the British culture was to disappear altogether and be replaced by the American one. This process was called "Americanisation", and is defined by Christopher Booker as "brash, standardized mass-culture, centered on the enormously increased influence of television and advertising, a popular music more marked than ever by the hypnotic beat of jazz, and the new prominence, as distinct social force, given to teenagers and the young" (Christopher Booker 35). Thus, Americanisation is generally perceived negatively, as synonymous with the decline of standards and the universalization of the products and audiences around the globe. In other words, Americanisation was deemed responsible for attempting to erase difference between nations and cultures.

In England, especially, the fear of Americanization reached massive proportions. Many British critics publicly condemned the American culture, which they saw as a giant monster spreading its tentacles all around the globe. They believed that the American culture, by replacing the British one, gives the youth inauthentic experiences, as they live through the struggles of another country. For example, critics such as Hoggart accuse the American mass culture of distancing the British youth "from the lived authenticity of their working-class backgrounds into the empty fantasy world of Americanized pleasure" (Hoggard 203-204). Thus, he claims that the good working men and women of England are fed illusions, for which they exchange their own identity and culture. Americanization is also held to blame for the poor quality of literature, as George Orwell heavily criticizes the popular genre of the detective novel, in which the gangster is portrayed as a hero (Strinati 26). Thus, it is not only that American popular culture is of low quality, but it also encourages immorality.

However, those who feared Americanization were, in turn, criticized. The idea of "Americanization" itself was denounced as a reductive concept. Edward Said claimed that "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (xxv). Therefore, what exactly does one mean by "Americanization"? These critics argued that since the American society is so diverse and the consumerist goods are so varied, we cannot speak of a singular culture which can be essentialized as the American culture. American culture is a conglomerate of all the cultures inhabiting it. Furthermore, John Storey points out that the problem with the fear of Americanization, or fear of globalization, is that "it operates with a limited concept of foreign, assuming that what is foreign

is always a question of national difference when it can be a question of sex, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation etc" (Storey 203-208).

Moreover, Dick Hebdige argues that in England, the youths who were considered to be in danger of losing their identity to an American one did not borrow singularly from the American scene. He points out that the America envisioned by the youth subculture of British is an "imaginary" one and they are using it "in their own ways". Moreover, the working-class youth did not borrow only from America, but from Italy and other nations as well (Hebdige quoted in Storey 81). Accordingly, the America created by Bowie and other fellow youths in the 1960s had little to do with the real United States. In other words, their America was similar to a fairy tale, which is also evident in the aforementioned Bowie's letter to Sandra, as he refuses to believe the more negative accounts of the American culture and, instead, chooses to believe the idealizations.

2.4. Chapter Overview

In this section of my dissertation I have presented an overview of Postmodernist theories regarding popular culture. The first section focused on examining the way in which the high versus the low debate developed through time. Having its origin point during the Industrial Revolution, the discrepancy between high and low increased as time passed, as the upper classes wanted to set themselves apart from lower classes. Postmodernist critics Lawrence Levine, Andreas Huyssen, or Pierre Bourdieu show that the upper classes put in motion a hierarchy of goods and tastes, which led to the lower and working classes feeling more and more distanced from certain cultural goods, lacking the education, money, or time to properly enjoy them.

Moreover, theorists such as Bryan Turner, Alan Swingewood, or Patrick Brantlinger also claim in their works that the distinction between high and popular is based on historical fallacies or incomplete assumptions which were generated by the upper classes in order to legitimize their authority over the cultural hierarchy. As such, Bryan Turner proves in *A Note on Nostalgia* that critics who deplore the state of culture today assume that there exists a Golden Standard from which all culture is departing. Furthermore, Alan Swingewood argues that the assumption that popular culture was created for the uneducated working-class is simply a myth, and actually the lower classes and upper classes were equal partners in the creation of popular culture. Finally, Patrick Brantlinger shows that the fear that democratizing culture may bring the end of all culture is based on inaccurate historical information, related to the decline of the Roman Empire.

In the last section, entitled "The Postmodernist Society: Empowerment and Popular Culture", I have shown that the distinction between high and popular became notably irrelevant in Postmodernism and that, as a consequence of the aestheticization of everyday life, the border between consumerist culture and popular culture also became blurred. Finally, I have also discussed the importance of subcultures, countercultures, and fandoms in maintaining the field of culture democratic, as they constantly challenge authority, and thus allow for previously marginalized voices to come forward. As alternative critical institutions, they prove necessary in destabilizing hierarchies and keeping popular culture varied and allowing for multiple entrances.

3. The Canon

While the previous chapters have presented an overview of the direction in which culture developed as a whole, this chapter will focus specifically on the field of literature. Therefore, we will look at the highs and lows of literature, and see whether the literary field followed the same path as culture in general. Some of the questions we will answer regard the formation of the canon, as well as its relevance and utility in the Postmodern society.

Hence, we are going to start by trying to define the canon and show its trajectory from its inception to present day. Although we do not intend to focus primarily on the contents of the canon as such, it is important to underline its shifting nature: something which was appreciated in the 19th century, might already be forgotten in the 20th. Fowler Alastair's *Kinds of Literature* is going to be particularly relevant when analyzing the preference of one genre over another in a specific period, while Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* and Leslie Fiedler's essays discuss the applicability of the canon in Postmodernity.

Secondly, we will observe the canon as an institution and analyze its components. Namely, we look at who decides what is part of the canon, at the critic as the legislator of taste, at the university as the institution which forms the critical eye, as well as at the process of value creation in general. Additionally, we will discuss the relevance of certain prestigious literary awards, in particular the Nobel prize for literature, as we look at the reasons why a certain text is preferred over another. We will touch upon the canon's flexibility in Postmodernity, and the ways in which certain literary genres which were not traditionally considered part of the high canon, such as science fiction and detective fiction, make their way into high culture through the works of writers such as Kurt Vonnegut, William Burroughs, Paul Auster, or Thomas Pynchon.

Finally, we will scrutinize the relation between music, subcultures, literature, and canons. In light of Bob Dylan's having recently won the Nobel prize for literature, I believe it is imperative to discuss the way in which the canon empowers marginal (in relation to high culture) literary accomplishments such as music lyrics, which are more appreciated for their social efficacy than their inherent aesthetic value.

3.1. Literature and the Canon

The literary canon is one of the most important institutions for the preservation and circulation of high culture in the Western world. Although each cultural field has its own canons, in this paper we are going to focus on the literary canon, which is defined as "authors and works that either used to be included in literature syllabi or textbooks, or those works that repeatedly appear in standard volumes of the history of literature, bibliographies, and literary criticism" (Wilczek 1687). Accordingly, the main purpose of the canon is to discern whether a literary text belongs to high culture or not. However, as we have seen above, in the Postmodernist society any claims to certainty are viewed as questionable or even precarious. Thus, who is to say, in the post-metanarrative era, what is of value and what is not? And, more importantly, to whom is that something valuable?

The birth of the canon is perceived as a consequence of the development of the institution of literary criticism during the Enlightenment, combined with the shift in the perception of authorship. Subsequently, critics such as Peter Hohendhal situate the emergence of the canon in the 18th century, when it was perceived as a tool aiding the emancipation of the middle classes, in their effort to distinguish themselves as a distinct class. As Hohendhal argues, at that time literature "served the emancipation movement of the middle class as an instrument to gain self-esteem and to articulate its human demands against the absolutist state and the hierarchical society" (Hohendahl 52). Hence, the creation of the canon is simultaneous with the effort to make art independent, releasing it from the tutelage of the aristocracy or of the church.

For Harold Bloom, the canon is an expression of immortality. Thus, the canon could have only appeared once the writers started taking authorship over their works. According to Bloom, the first writer to ever realize this great power that comes out of literature was Dante Alighieri, who first had "the most intense consciousness that he is a distributor of fame and indeed of immortality" (Bloom 20). Hence, the canon represents a repository of all the texts which are worthy of not being forgotten.

If, up until the second half of the 20th century, it was clear which texts deserved to be part of the canon, in Postmodernism this issue becomes more problematic, as not only are the new texts heavily scrutinized for being (or not being) part of the canon, but the canon itself is being questioned. Many Postmodernists critics, such as Angela McRobbie, Andreas Huyssen, or Leslie Fiedler view the canon as a segregating device, and as a tool in the hands of the ruling class to

preserve their status quo. In their views, the canon is corrupted and inherently biased, and the Postmodern society should get over canons and hierarchies altogether. There should not be one canon, but multiple canons. However, the existence of various canons goes against the canon itself, since when a vast number of different hierarchies in the same field appear, they lose their relevance. Accordingly, a large number of critics defended the canon, as a necessary institution for the healthy development of culture. Those critics are, as hinted before, T. S. Eliot (earlier), Harold Bloom, or Frederic Jameson.

The defenders of the canon usually emphasize the importance of the canon in preserving tradition and history. As Harold Bloom claims, a canon comprises everything that was of value written in the past, and it is "identical with the Art of Memory, not with the religious sense of canon" (Bloom 17). Hence, the most important feature of the canon is not its standardizing function, but its ability to preserve value. The texts in the canon are not meant to provide sacrosanct guidelines for new writers, neither are they supposed to be unattainable models, but the canon itself is a way of showing respect and recognizing the value of certain writers.

T. S. Eliot, before Harold Bloom, underlined the same ideas in his famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", where he argues that for a writer to properly develop, he or she needs to be aware of what was written before. Consequently, the canon offers this historical rooting, without which a mature writer cannot exist. In addition to a well-developed historical sense, a proper writer also needs sense of familiarity with the literary works written before him, as Eliot says that "the historical sense compels a man to write not merely to his own generation in bones, but with a feeling that the whole literature from Homer and within it the whole literature of his own country as a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (Eliot 37).

Hence, in Eliot's view, the works in the canon display a somewhat organic relation to each other. Although they may have different authors, different themes and techniques, or were written in different times, they send a unified message. When a new work is added into the canon, all the other texts readjust their positions, reshuffling in order to achieve harmony:

> The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is the conformity between the old and the new (Eliot, "Tradition" 37).

Ergo, the canon is not fixed, and it constantly undergoes changes. However, it is important to underline that the canon is at all times complete. The addition or the subtraction of one work determines a reorganizing of its entire content in order to achieve the sense of unity. More importantly, the works in the canon are always relevant, regardless of the time when they are read or when they were written.

T. S. Eliot and Harold Bloom agree, however, that the reason the canon is crucial is because it allows us to open a conversation with what was written before. Changes brought to the canon, as we have seen above, do not destabilize or destroy it, but rather bring the newly added work into the seamless web, making it part of the unity. Harold Bloom argues, thus, that the canon is perceived as "a confrontation with one's own immortality" (Bloom 30). The canon is immortal while we, humans, are "mortal and also rather belated" (Bloom 30). Therefore, the canon is a tool in our hands, which gives us the chance to achieve immortality. However, it should be handled with responsibility, and this is precisely why we should be careful with our choices regarding who makes it into the canon and who gets excluded.

For other critics, such as Charles Altieri, the canon is a site of ethics, and he defines it as a "permanent theater helping us shape and judge personal and social values" (Altieri 40). The canon is, then, a guide not only for writers, but for us all to enrich our daily existence and become better individuals. For Charles Altieri, the "works we canonize tend to project ideals, and the roles we can imagine for the canon require us to consider seriously the place of idealization in social life" (Altieri 42). Accordingly, the canon is a repository of what is perceived as good in the society at one point, and it represents a mirror for our society. A successful, therefore a canonical work of art, has the power to make the audience identify with it (Altieri 42).

Harold Bloom, on the other hand, dismisses these views, as he underlines that "reading deeply in the canon will not make one a better or a worse person, a more useful or a more harmful citizen. The mind's dialogue with itself is not primarily a social reality" (Bloom 30). Thus, Bloom's views echo the Frankfurt School's ideal of separating art from real life. According to him, it is not the canon's duty to change society or provide moral behavior examples; it is simply a place in which we store value. The canon should not be involved in politics, and the further away from real life it is, the better. We are going to turn back to Bloom's views on the canon when we discuss the criteria according to which the admission to the canon is made.

A more pragmatic definition to the canon is provided by Frank Kermode, who describes the canon as a historical document which reveals which texts appealed to a certain society at one point or another in history, and which methods of interpretation were favored at that time ("Institutional Control" 72-86). Although he argues that the canon reflects the literary taste of the era, he also underlines the importance of the critical eye. The traditional canon, after all, is a creation of the critical institution.

Thus, the critical institution oversees the creation of the canon and has a main role in preserving history. However, the critical institutions have often been criticized for protecting their own interests and constituting hierarchies of value based on their subjective preferences. As we will see further on, the canon has been firmly criticized for mainly consisting of white male writers, as women writers have often been associated with sentimental and non-valuable texts, which are not worthy of critical interpretation. Thus, in the following paragraphs we will look at the changes that happened in Postmodernism, which ultimately led to the creation of a more open and more flexible canon.

3.2. Value and the Critical Institution

Any inquiry into the nature of canons or hierarchies of any sort would be fruitless without firstly delving into the realm of value and value creation. As we have seen before, the canon is celebrated by its supporters for its aptness to distinguish value from non-value, and its capacity to then preserve that which is valuable. However, the entire selection, undoubtedly coordinated by the critical elites, has been a permanent reason for debate. Thus, Charles Altieri argues, the canon represents an endless negotiation (Altieri 37), as we try to distinguish between works which are meant to be passed on to our successors, and works which are destined to "Apocrypha", or to forgetfulness, as Frank Kermode calls it ("Institutional Control" 76).

Traditionally, the two opposing views regarding value were the rationalist view and the positivist one, as John Fekete shows in *Life After Postmodernism* (Fekete 66). For rationalists such as Kant or Hegel, the concept of value is universal, while, for positivists, values are empirically constructed and supported by certain individuals or groups which consider them valid. Extrapolated to the canon, this debate could be simplified as one between those who argue that the works in the canon are generally important, and their value is inherent, irrespective of individual opinions, while the others assert that the canon is a subjective creation, and value lies in the eye of the beholder. Accordingly, the rationalist and the positivist views are at the base of the traditional versus the postmodernist canon-related debate.

The critics, universities, or professors have traditionally overseen the creation and distribution of value. The way in which they did that was via the canon, through prizes and awards, public recognition, or the inclusion of certain works in academic curricula. According to Frank Kermode, the critical institutions work akin to ecclesiastical ones, and that should not be surprising, since the etymological origin of the word 'canon' is clerical. He underlines that both the critical institutions and the church are in charge of interpreting texts and then nominating those which are valid. Moreover, they share features such as: "Self-perpetuating, hierarchical, authoritative, much concerned with the questions of canon, and wont, as we are, to distinguish sharply between initiate and uninitiate readings" (Kermode, "Institutional Control" 75).

Accordingly, for Frank Kermode, such an authoritative stance on righteousness is conservative by definition. Both institutions constantly attempt to defend themselves "against charges of inauthenticity or low value" ("Institutional Control" 80), by claiming that they are in possession of the ultimate truth. Moreover, inside such institutions, hierarchy is of utmost

importance - the “seniors”, who are the leaders, are the ones who ultimately decide the value of a work. They do that through carefully regulating not only the texts themselves, but those who are to become future interpreters themselves, preparing the young scholars to work within the institutional frame (Kermode, “Institutional Control” 80).

Thus, the critical institution appears to be a self-perpetuating circle. The students are taught interpretational skills by the seniors (their professors), who, in return, expect them to conform to the institutional requirements. Only those students who properly adhere to the vision of the university (or critical school) are then admitted to the institution and have the opportunity to become seniors themselves. Through this, the institution keeps its legacy and defends its tradition and status. However, there are also situations in which academia has to deal with disobedient texts or authors, who refuse to follow the rules.

3.2.1 The Status of the Canon in Postmodernism

According to Frank Kermode, there are two ways in which academia deals with deviant texts. Such texts are either legitimized, and thus made to fit the academic perspective, or simply annihilated. The way in which works from the outside are legitimized by the academia is by creating the impression that the institution is flexible and open, as it organizes various events which support this: for example, conferences or programs which include talks on marginal topics, such as black literature, women literature, LGBTQ+ literature, Native American literature and so on (Kermode, "Institutional Control" 82). Frank Kermode argues that this approach is "evidence of the ability of the institution to control marginal innovation and unrest" ("Institutional Control" 82), and it also represents the most common way in which a new doctrine is legitimized (Kermode, "Institutional Control" 81).

Although the critical interpretation process is presented as a very strict and conservative one by Frank Kermode, Harold Bloom, who, as we have seen before, is one of the defenders of the canon, claims the opposite. He admits that, even though the canon must be protected at all costs, "no one has the authority to tell us what the Western Canon is, certainly not from 1800 to the present day" (Bloom 37). Accordingly, although the canon should promote the best of everything that has been written before, he is doubtful that anybody or anything can claim full monopoly over the value creation industry. Thus, it is erroneous to attribute complete authority to someone or something over which work is canonical and which is not.

For this reason, Harold Bloom is highly critical of the new left-wing, particularly of the feminists or civil rights activists, who attempt to involve politics into the works of the canon. He sees their attempts to legitimize marginal works purely based on politics, not on aesthetic value. Moreover, Bloom sees their attempts to "open" the canon as superfluous, calling them "a strictly redundant operation" (Bloom 37), as he emphasizes that "no secular canon is ever closed" (Bloom 37). In other words, the canon has always been flexible, and it is one of its inherent attributes to change its contents according to the historical period.

Those who disapprove of the canon are categorized by Harold Bloom as members of the "School of Resentment", as he believes that they judge a work of art based on their subjectivity, rather than follow the aesthetic principles (Bloom 37). To them, the canon is elitist, biased, and only reflects the taste of the upper class, while overlooking the writers who were not part of the ruling elite (such as women or people of color). Leslie Fiedler is one of the young critics who

vehemently protested against the canon in the 1960s, deeming it irrelevant in the Postmodern context (Fiedler, *The Devil* xvi). He claims that most of the literary critics are enclosed in their small communities and they fail to address the general public, thus contributing to the estrangement of the audience from the work of art (Fiedler, *The Devil* xvi). Consequently, Fiedler insists that the critical texts should use more approachable language and should not only focus on what is perceived as high literature, but on what is attributed to the popular field as well. The two of them, combined, are keys to understanding ourselves as human beings, and only taking one into account offers us an incomplete overview (Fiedler, *The Devil* xxiv).

The way in which the traditional canon works, Fiedler claims, does not satisfy modern audiences anymore. Consequently, he advocates for the creation of a new canon, based on the values of an "open society and the writers of song and story" (Fiedler, *The Devil* 131). Authoritarian tendencies inside the canon should be a thing of the past, as he claims that the failure of the critics to see beyond their status has led to ignorance. For example, writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe or Margaret Mitchell have been for a long time neglected by the canon, which, at times, was full of "snobbism and misogyny" (Fiedler, *The Devil* 130). Hence, Fiedler argues that many high-profile literary critics, such as Francis Otto Matthiessen, who wrote *American Renaissance* (1941), or David Herbert Lawrence, whose *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1924) was greatly influential, intentionally overlooked in their analysis works written by women (such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), and they frequently complained about "damned female scribblers" (qtd in Fiedler, *The Devil* 130). Thus, in Fiedler's view, the critics are not as objective as they claim, and their analyses are often incomplete or biased.

Moreover, the standards which were held in high regard by traditional critics, as indisputable proofs of value, were dismantled by Postmodernist critics. As we have seen before, Pierre Bourdieu deconstructed the concept of taste, showing that it is not an objective criterion, but rather dependent upon the person who is making the appreciation; it is not something innate, but acquired through education. Ultimately, taste is just a concept used to legitimize forms of social domination, create social hierarchies, and establish social differences between various categories (see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*).

By the same token, the assumption that academia (and here we also count acclaimed critical schools which derive from universities) is the only institution accredited to offer value to a literary work is also questioned. John Fekete underlines that through academia value gains a universal

status, as something produced by the brightest minds a field has to offer (Fekete 73). However, in Postmodernism all universal attempts to knowledge have lost ground, as Lyotard claimed when he declared the death of all metanarratives. As a result, John Storey argues that the main problem with academia and the way in which it evaluates artistic goods is that these communities "insist that their community of others is an ideal community, with absolute cultural authority over all other valuing communities" (Storey 202). This claim to excellence and superiority ends up disregarding alternative valuing communities, who are considered inferior and unknowledgeable.

3.2.2 The Crisis of the Intellectual

The assimilation of the cultural field into the economical field in Postmodernism, created two main problems, according to Frederic Jameson: "problems of evaluation" and "problems of interpretation" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 131). These problems contribute to what Jameson perceives as the "breakdown, or at least the crisis, of the canon", which means that it has become almost impossible to distinguish between cultural products or establish hierarchies of any kind between them (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 131). In other words, it is not only the cultural products themselves which are brought into question, but, more importantly, the role of the critic himself or herself. The constant questioning and devaluation of the critic may have catastrophic consequences, as it leads to anti-intellectual stances, according to Jameson (Jameson, "Reification and Utopia" 115).

In "Reification and Utopia" Frederic Jameson is highly critical of anti-intellectualism, which he defines as "deeply rooted conviction in American populism that articulates a widely based sense that high culture is an establishment phenomenon, irredeemably tainted by its association with institutions, in particular the university" (Jameson 115). Accordingly, although those "populist radicals" who attack the high culture institutions are also intellectuals, the problem is that their revolt lacks substance: while they discard the traditional cultural institutions, they do not bring anything else in return, as s/he "offers no method for reading even those cultural objects it valorizes and has had little of interest to say about their content" (Jameson, "Reification" 115).

Consequently, Jameson argues that through the collision of the economic and cultural sphere, we have lost the critical space:

> a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and as yet unauthorised sense (Jameson qtd in Storey 195).

The solution to the crisis of culture, as well as to the anti-intellectual attacks, is to reinstitute the critic as a legislator of value. Frederic Jameson follows the tradition of the Frankfurt School when he argues that there is an urgent need for the intellectuals to reclaim their status as cultural judges and to guide the masses who are now passively consuming. He states that "without the critic, they

[the masses] are unable to even hear their own cries of hopelessness" (quoted in Storey 195). While the Modernist culture encouraged the division between high and popular culture, Postmodernism lost the "critical space", and with it the authorized voice of the intellectual as a taste legislator.

As we have seen in the previous section, critics such as Angela McRobbie, Stuart Hall, or Michael Featherstone see nothing but the crisis of the white male identity in Jameson's laments. The culture is not at risk, it is livelier than ever, and everybody now has the possibility to express himself or herself, making his or her voice heard. Moreover, as John Fekete claims, what happened is not that we have lost the cultural field, but we have entered a new stage in the development of culture, which does not center around one institution exclusively responsible for the creation and dissimilation of value, but places more emphasis on the pluralism of value.

However, John Fekete does not idealize the pluralization of value, as he claims that Postmodern critics are well aware of the dangers of living in such a society. He claims that

> We need to believe and enact the belief that there are better and worse ways to live the pluralism of value. To see all cows the same color would truly amount to being lost in the night. But the prospect of learning to be at ease with limited warranties, and with the responsibility for issuing them, without the false security of inherited guarantees is promising for a livelier, more colorful, and, one hopes, more tolerant culture that draws enjoyment from the dappled relations between meaning and value (Fekete ix).

Hence, Postmodernism finally offers us the possibility to "get on without the Good-God-Gold Standards, one and all, indeed, without any capitalized Standards" (Fekete ix). Leslie Fiedler also sees the plurality of value in optimistic terms, as he argues that in the future we may be able to

> read without prejudice hitherto despised works by underprivileged groups in society: women; Black Americans; Native Americans; homosexuals; even Rednecks", [whose works have been] "underestimated … because the earlier makers of our canon had been chiefly college-educated, straight, WASP males, who (speaking only to each other) had found it possible to identify their parochial prejudices with universal aesthetic standards (Fiedler 131).

For Adam Katz, the Postmodernist paradox in the humanities is related to the two opposing beliefs which co-exist within each Postmodernist cultural analyst, which he describes as a "professional anxiety over the impossibility of maintaining both the institutional legitimation of cultural studies as a (non)field of study, and its radical character (which constitutes only legitimation of its existence as a critique of dominant forms of knowledge)" (Katz 46). In other words, he argues that, while it is the duty of the Postmodernist researcher to challenge traditional views on the cultural field, at the same time s/he still works from within the institutional framework. Thus, the cultural analyst finds himself or herself working against the establishment while being part of it.

3.3. The Canonical Texts

Lastly, in this final part of the section we will examine some of the elements which may privilege one text over another. Although we have argued above that, in Postmodernism, the canon has become mostly irrelevant, it would be delusive to claim that the canon or high culture is altogether dead. As Dominic Strinati wonders, "if art and popular culture can still be distinguished from each other, then how far can the breakdown be said to have gone?" (Strinati 230). Moreover, inside the academia, there are still hierarchies of value and texts which are preferred over others, as well are prizes and ceremonies which are considered more prestigious than others. Accordingly, we are going to briefly look at some of them and see the factors which contribute to a certain text's addition to or subtraction from the canon.

Alastair Fowler, whose *Kinds of Literature* (1982) is one of the most influential and exhaustive studies which trace the history of literary preferences, argues that, historically speaking, the genre has been one of the most important factors which determine whether a work is to be included in the canon or not (216). As such, a clear hierarchy of genres has developed throughout the ages, certain genres being preferred over others. The classical period, Fowler shows, favored the epic over the pastoral, while romantic poetry and short poems were at the bottom of the hierarchy (Fowler 216-217). In the 18th century, didactic poetry came to be as respected as the epic, while the 19th century saw the rise of the novel (Fowler 223). Nowadays, the novel is still one of the most appreciated genres, but even within this particular genre, there are classifications, certain types being more respected than others. Verisimilar novels, Fowler underlines, are preferred over fantasy, westerns, detective stories, or others.

Libraries and bookstores preserve such distinctions by arranging and classifying books according to value standards. For example, science fiction, Fowler observes, has been for a long while sold alongside pornography (226). While we will discuss more about science fiction in the analytical chapters, when we discuss David Bowie, it is important to note that Postmodernist writers seem to rebel against the prejudice brought upon these genres. Writers such as Kurt Vonnegut often criticized those who disregard science fiction as a worthless genre, both in his essays and in novels. In *Breakfast for Champions*, for example, he addresses this issue in particular, as he presents the main character, Kilgore Trout, selling his science fiction novels with pornographic illustrations.

Kurt Vonnegut is not the only canonical writer who includes genres which were traditionally considered inferior in his texts, as this is a rather common Postmodern technique. Writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Paul Auster, or William Burroughs have also included science-fiction, gothic, or detective story plots in their texts, and they were commended for that with awards and institutional recognition. Consequently, Fowler argues, the canon becomes more varied: certain genres which were previously uncanonical have started being included in the great tradition, and he offers as examples the dystopic fantasy, the fabulation, the poioumenon, or the historical novel of ideas, which are now preserved inside the canon (Fowler 223).

Alastair Fowler also observers that song lyrics have also had an interesting passage throughout the canonical and the uncanonical. Thus, he points out that in the 19th century the best lyrics and songs were preserved alongside poetry, as observed in Francis Turner Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics*, or Quiller Couch's Oxford *Book of English Verse*. Although the value of song lyrics decreased over the following years, the Swedish Academy's decision to award the Nobel Prize for Literature to Bob Dylan seems to be reopening the doors for lyrics to be taken seriously. However, it must be noted that Bob Dylan is not the first songwriter to be awarded the Nobel Prize. In 1913, writer Rabindranath Tagore received the Nobel "because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West" (www.nobelprize.org).

Another important aspect to be taken into consideration when analyzing the value recognition process is related to problems regarding accessibility and censorship. Therefore, when determining the canonical status of a work, we also need to take into account how accessible that text is to both readers and critics. There are many instances in which writers were not acknowledged during their lifetime, but they were rather discovered after they died. Such examples include Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Franz Kafka, or John Fante, to name but a few.

The accessibility of a text is not only decided by the popularity of its author, but also by its reception by the ruling class. For instance, books such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Animal Farm*, *Lolita*, or *Tropic of Cancer* were banned in various places of the globe, for a longer or shorter period of time, due to inappropriate content. Accordingly, such books were restricted from making it into the canon because of political issues. However, censorship is not only representative of dictatorships (religious or not), as even in capitalism each institution has the right to ban books

according to its liking. Hence, the most banned books in 2019 in the USA, according to CNN, are related to LGBTQ issues, racism, inappropriate sexual descriptions, or even witchcraft (Andrew, "Some of the…").

In traditional patriarchal societies, gender has also played a big role in the value recognition process. On that account, throughout history, many books were considered inferior simply because they were written by women. As Alastair Fowler shows, gender has been the main reason why Jane Austen's novels have been avoided by critics for such a long time. He argues that her novels were described as "domestic, feminine, 'lower'" (Fowler 228) by the leading critics of the time. Clearly then, such authors could not make it to the canon not because of the quality of their writing, but because of issues unrelated to aesthetic standards.

A final point that needs to be made in relation to the canonization of a text, which is concerned more with form than aesthetics, regards the translation process. Generally, for a book to be able to win an international literary award, it must be, if not written, at least translated into English. Therefore, the quality of the translation is very important when assigning value to a book: a good translation may elevate the status of the book, while a bad translation could stir less enthusiastic reactions. Piotr Wilczek lists four requirements which must be met by a non-English literary text in order to become canonical: "a good translation into English made by an already well-established translator; a well-known publisher", "a recommendation from a critic who belongs to influential literary circles", "and an enthusiastic review in a major literary journal or magazine" (Wilczek 1687).

3.3.1. High and Low Audiences – The Case of High Avant-garde Music

The distinction between ‘facile’ and ‘difficult’ texts has been another factor which has contributed to the canonization of certain texts over others. Thus, as Pierre Bourdieu shows, the critic has always preferred the difficult text, which requires layers over layers of interpretation, over the popular text, which was considered simple in its nature, aimed at uneducated tastes (Bourdieu 486). For Bourdieu, “the whole language of aesthetics is contained in a fundamental refusal of … all the meanings which bourgeois facile ethics and aesthetics give to the world” (486). Accordingly, the pure taste is displeased by everything that is “easy in the sense of simple, and therefore shallow, and ‘cheap’, because it is easily decoded and culturally ‘undemanding’” (Bourdieu 486).

This attitude is well exemplified by the case of avant-garde music in the beginning of the 20th century, for which a larger audience was equivalent to its failure. In music, probably more than literature (because, undoubtedly, there are more listeners than there are readers), the audience acts like a mirror for the musician. In other words, the type of audiences that one attracts says a lot about the type of work that one produces. Therefore, for a genre which prides itself on its complexity and difficulty in interpretation, being appreciated by a large number of people may be perceived as an insult. Moreover, as Susan McClary shows in her article, “The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition”, for the avant-garde composers no audience is better than mass audience (McClary 57-81).

For composers such as Pierre Boulez, Arnold Schoenberg, or Milton Babbitt, popularity is a sign of failure and it shows that “either the music or the audience was worthless” (Schonenberg 51). Even more, in this case, the public is merely a distraction for the fulfilled composer, as Milton Babbitt believes that the composer should isolate him or herself and create ignoring the public demands (126). The only audience that matters is the one presented by the University, which “should provide a home for the ‘complex’, ‘difficult’, and ‘problematical’ in music” (Babbit 126). Serious music should not make a profit, but still, the composers must be able to live comfortably through scholarships and grants.

However, such an attitude is not advisable, Susan McClary argues, as she says that by avoiding the public altogether, the musical avant-garde managed to silence itself, ending up having “no impact on the history of music whatsoever” (Susan McClary 64). Although, as Pierre Bourdieu claims, “Cultivated pleasure feeds on these intertwined references, which reinforce and legitimate

each other, producing, inseparably, belief in the value of works of art" (Bourdieu 499), the life of a cultural product in isolation leads to nowhere. Moreover, for Susan McClary such an attitude is a representation of "the last hurrah of a historical bloc that lost its hegemonic grip on culture at the turn of the century" (Susan McClary 64).

3.3.2 The Canon and the Academic Curriculum

Although literary prizes and an author's inclusion in critical volumes brings recognition and admission into the canon, it is important to mention that a more pragmatic way of introducing one work or another into the canon is via the academic curriculum. Hence, universities function as both distributors and creators of value. The lists of books and authors studied and discussed in humanistic universities also create canons, and show which texts are seen as valuable in certain institutions. Moreover, literature professors are also literary critics, and thus perceived as authorities in the field of literature, worthy of passing on their knowledge to the future experts.

Professor Michael Schudson believes that the curriculum and the canon should first be pedagogic, teaching students how to think and how to interpret a larger variety of texts, rather than just normative (Schudson 58). For him, "nothing that is human should be foreign to the 'humanities' in a university" (58). Thus, students should also analyze texts which are considered lower in quality, but which appeal to larger masses of people. Students and critics should look at how and why these types of texts appeal to people, analyzing reading patterns, and uncovering what they reveal about us as humans. Additionally, reading such texts also teaches students to read critically, and the main purpose of the university should be to educate students to become better readers (Schudson 59).

Critics such as Darko Suvin or Carl Freedman, who are also university professors, and who devoted their study to science fiction, challenged what they perceived as an outdated academic curriculum. Both criticized the generally negative views on science-fiction in universities, and the inability of critics to distinguish between good science fiction and bad science-fiction. Darko Suvin, one of the pioneers of science fiction studies, who pushed for science fiction to be studied in universities in the 1960s, argues that "a discipline which refuses to take into account 90 percent or more of what constitutes its domain seems to me not only to have large zones of blindness, but to also run the risk of distorted vision in the small zone in focuses on (so-called high lit)" (Suvin vii). In other words, they argue that the humanist universities should study not only what the most educated strata of population read, but what the trends and the popular texts are as well

3.3.3 Literary Prizes and Awards

As we cannot, nowadays, speak about a singular canon, which has authority over all the others, the numbers of prizes and awards in the literary industry has increased over the past decades, and we see that most of these awards are not necessarily intended for 'the best of the best', but cover a rather limited area. Thus, of course we have international awards, which attempt to objectively reward the best author/writing, such as the Nobel Prize for Literature or the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, but most of the awards are divided according to country, region, language, genre, or even literary translation. Probably the most prestigious out of all the literary prizes are considered to be Nobel Prize for Literature, the Man Booker Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, or the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Whilst the winning of a literary prize does not guarantee its favorable reception by all the critical institutions or its inclusion in academic curricula or critical volumes, they are still hierarchical representations of the literary field. Thus, I will not attempt a historical overview of all the winners, which would not be relevant for my dissertation. Nevertheless, the Swedish Academy's 2016 decision to award the prize to a song writer, rather than a traditional writer, stirred a lot of controversies. The Academy justified its choice of offering Bob Dylan the award in a press release, "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition" (www.nobelprize.org). As expected, this decision triggered a great number of responses, as well as reopened the debate about what literature is.

Those who supported the Swedish Academy's choice pointed out that acknowledging song lyrics does not represent such a dramatic break from tradition as claimed by the others. Secretary of the Academy Sara Danius argued that

> If you look back, far back, 2,500 years or so, you discover Homer and Sappho and they wrote poetic texts that were meant to be listened to, that were meant to be performed, often with instruments -- and it's the same way with Bob Dylan … He can be read and should be read -- he's a great poet in the English tradition (TLS)

Moreover, writers such as Joyce Carol Oates, winner of the National Book Award for Fiction in 1970, congratulated the committee for their choice, arguing that Bob Dylan's "haunting music & lyrics have always seemed, in the deepest sense, 'literary'", according to her Twitter account

(@JoyceCarolOates). Other writers, such as Salman Rushdie and John Scalzi also sent their congratulations to Bob Dylan, applauding the Academy's decision. Fellow lyricists, amongst whom Leonard Cohen, also congratulated Dylan, as he compared giving the prize to Dylan to "pinning a medal on Mount Everest for being the highest mountain" (The Guardian).

However, not everybody was supportive of the Academy's decision. Scottish writer Irvine Welsh posted his reaction on Twitter, as he accused both the award and the Nobel committee for being "an ill-conceived nostalgia award wrenched from the rancid prostates of senile, gibbering hippies" (@IrveneWelsh). By the same token, historian Tim Stanley was equally disappointed, and in the headline for his UK *Telegraph* article he openly accused the committee for making a populist decision rather than basing their decision on genuine value: "A world that gives Bob Dylan a Nobel Prize is a world that nominates Trump for president" (The Telegraph).

Furthermore, writer Gary Shteyngart also made sarcastic comments addressed to the Academy, questioning their decision: "I totally get the Nobel committee. Reading books is hard" (@Shteyngart). Novelist Jodi Picoult was also displeased with the Academy's decision, as she teased on her Twitter account the possibility of her winning a Grammy: "I'm happy for Bob Dylan. #ButDoesThisMeanICanWinAGrammy?" (@jodipicoult). Other reactions, such as novelist Tim Federle's, editor Maris Kreizman's, or writer Claudia Gray's focused on expressing their surprise at the Academy's decision who, once again, overlooked important writers who had been denied that prize for a long time, in particular novelist Philip Roth.

Overall, we see that the controversy surrounding Bob Dylan's Nobel is yet another reiteration of the *high versus low* debate. Although the canon of high culture is more flexible and more tolerant of outsider genres, the academic world is still divided between the traditionalists and the nonconformists. Andreas Huyssen's assessment seems to still be relevant today, as he argued that "I am not saying that the pedestal of high art does not exist anymore. Of course it does, but it's not what it used to be" (Huyssen 219). Probably the distinction will never disappear completely, but that is one of the repercussions of living with the pluralism of values.

3.4. Chapter Overview

In this section, we have envisaged the canon as a representation of high culture and we have drawn some conclusions regarding its status in Postmodernism. Thus, in the first part of the chapter we have defined the canon, presenting both traditionalist and Postmodernist definitions for it. We have concluded that, at the core of the debate regarding the relevance of the canon in Postmodernity, is the value granting process: for Postmodernist critics, the social efficacy of a text is more important than the traditional literary values.

Then, we have moved on to look at some of the canonical texts, and we have analyzed some of the hierarchies inside the canon, in particular the one regarding genre. We have concluded that there are various factors that contribute to a good reception of a literary work, which are often not related to literature itself, such as the translation, censorship issues, or the gender of the author (in patriarchal societies). Therefore, we have implied that many times the critical apparatus cannot function properly, as either the state, or other outside circumstances obstruct the objective nature of the canon.

Last but not least, we have analyzed some of the reactions to the Swedish' Academy decision to offer the Nobel prize to Bob Dylan, and we have discussed some of its implications. Accordingly, the academic world is as divided as ever, and the blurring of the boundaries between high culture and popular culture does not mean that we give up standards altogether, but rather that we learn to live with the pluralism of values, in a world in which we no longer rely on any "Good-God-Gold Standards", as John Fekete called them (ix).

II. Science fiction

In this particular chapter, we will look at the genre of science fiction, and analyze its transition from a dismissed genre, viewed with suspicion by traditional literary critics, to one of the most popular genres in Postmodernism, used in both academia and in mass-media as a tool for fighting stereotypes and for portraying outsiders. Along these lines, the aliens, androids, or the distant planets or futures which are present in this genre function often as comments about our own society. Moreover, by learning how to relate to the outsiders in science fiction, we learn how to relate and how to empathize with those who are marginal in our own society.

The first section will provide a short overview of science fiction's trajectory from a mediocre genre to one that is widely accepted in the Academia. Thus, while we do not intend to focus intensely on the history of the genre as such, we are going to point out some pivotal changes that science fiction has suffered throughout history, which have led to its development into what it is today. We are also going to examine the genre's popularity throughout the early 20th century and its ability to generate subcultures or fandoms, which constitute alternative critical institutions. If the academia and the prestigious literary critics decided to overlook science fiction in their analyses, the fans created intricate structures of feedback and communication, through which they devised their own hierarchies of value. In other words, it could be argued that the early science-fiction writers were employing Postmodern techniques of engaging and interacting with audiences, while also providing opportunities for youth empowerment not only through texts, but through other signs as well (as Dick Hebdige showed in his study on subcultures, through commodities such as posters, illustrations, various drawings, or the pulp magazine as a collectible itself).

After this brief overview of the genre's history, we move on to the analytical part, where we discuss various science fiction themes and the way in which they are used in Postmodernism to empower marginal voices. As science fiction is intrinsically linked to subcultures and fandoms, in order to better exemplify the way in which science fiction works through subcultures to strive for empowerment, I have decided to use David Bowie for my applied case study. Throughout his career, David Bowie released twenty-seven studio albums, out of which at least half are concerned with science fiction themes, this leading to his becoming not only a pop idol, but a science fiction symbol as well. Moreover, as professor Angela Ndalianis argues in her article, *Bowie and Science Fiction,* "David Bowie embodies a recognizable 'science fictionality'" (140), meaning that "his

persona takes with him all the science fiction meanings in whatever context he appears" (Ndalianis 145). Consequently, irrespective of where he appears, David Bowie is going to confer the text yet another layer of meaning to that text, which is going to be science fictional in nature.

As this is an intertextual and interdisciplinary study, I have decided to not only look at David Bowie's science fiction creations, but pursue his influences as well. Thus, the texts which I am going to analyze in this chapter are somewhat related. While they still make sense if studied independently, their comparative interpretation brings to the surface a new layer of meaning. It is also worth mentioning that the texts that I have chosen vary from traditional science fiction novels (such as Arthur Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or Walter Tevis' *The Man Who Fell to Earth*), to song lyrics (Bowie's songs), musicals (Bowie's and Enda Walsh' musical *Lazarus*), movies (the film adaptations for *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*), music videos (in particular Bowie's *Blackstar* or short stories written in the album inlay (for Bowie's *1.Outside* album). Therefore, the wide selection of texts makes this paper an interdisciplinary one, as I am more interested in a thematic analysis of certain concepts and their actualizations in various different texts, rather than in limiting the analysis to merely the literary field as such.

Hence, the first theme we will analyze is that of the astronaut and of space travel as a way of to better know the inner self. The absolute loneliness experienced by astronauts such as David Bowman in Arthur Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* or Major Tom in Bowie's *Space Oddity* are moments of reflection regarding human purpose and the quest for alterity. Furthermore, these texts, alongside the future materializations of the astronaut in David Bowie's work, represent meditations on the relationship between popular culture, religion, and youth subcultures.

Secondly, we are going to look at the alien as an embodiment of the outsider. The aliens we are going to focus on are Ziggy Stardust, from Bowie's album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, and Thomas Jerome Newton from Walter Tevis' novel *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, which was adapted for screen by Nicolas Roeg, then turned into a musical by Enda Walsh and David Bowie. Consequently, we will investigate the way in which Bowie challenged gender stereotypes by portraying a bisexual androgynous alien and generating a subculture to back him up. As a result, this section will continue Dick Hebdige's inquiry into subcultures. Further on, we will explore Newton's status as the most evident outsider out of all outsiders, and his quest to fit into a deeply fragmented Postmodernist world. Thus, we aim to illustrate Angela McRobbie's claim that Newton represents the hybrid, unformed identity which

is finally allowed to have a voice in Postmodernism, while also portraying the crisis of the white heterosexual male.

Last but not least, we will bring to the fore one of the most prolific science fiction genres in Postmodernism, cyberpunk, as we discuss David Bowie's album *1.Outside*. This album represents a Postmodernist take on the status of art and canonization, being placed in the near-future dystopic world of Outside. Hence, we intend to show that the world of Outside is an embodiment of the unrooted, schizophrenic, and fragmented contemporary world, in which figures of authority have lost all their claim to righteousness, as they find it impossible to navigate the intricate Postmodernist maze.

1. Science fiction: from Popular to Empowering

Although science fiction is one of the most popular genres of the 2000s, it actually developed as a genre throughout the 19th century, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) being catalogued as the first science fiction story ever published. It is interesting to point out that even though, in the beginning, the genre gathered the attention of various canonic writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe, in the first half of the 20th century science fiction is viewed as a second rate genre by intellectuals, Kurt Vonnegut aptly noting that it was frequently mistaken by critics for "a urinal" (Vonnegut 2). Thus, in the following paragraphs we will look at science fiction's reputation decline in the 19th and early 20th century, and its rescue in Postmodernity.

It is important mention that, thematically, science fiction existed even prior to the 19th century, but it lacked specific narrative forms. Mostly, this type of stories depicted fantastic lunar or interstellar voyages which were, however, explained as simple dreams or visions. What these stories lacked was the scientific or technological explanation that would make the story more realistic. Consequently, 19th century writers such as Edgar Allan Poe experimented with various ways to overcome the limitations of the previous fantastic stories. For example, in *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* (1835), he tries to explain in a more scientific manner the way in which his main character, Hans Pfaall, managed to reach the lunar surface by travelling with a hot air balloon. Despite the fact that his explanations could not be supported by the science of the time, and the story was not meant to be taken seriously, Edgar Allan Poe believed that there needed to be a more specific genre for this type of narratives, and that writers should try and come up with new formulas for space exploration (Stableford 18). Shortly after, in 1851, writer William Wilson coined the term "science fiction" in *A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old*.

Although the science fiction stories of Edgar Allan Poe did not enjoy much popularity in the United States, due to Charles Baudelaire's translations, his stories reached larger audiences in France. French writers, especially Jules Verne, took Poe's struggle to find an adequate narrative form for science fiction to a new level, and their science fiction reached an even wider audience. However, this is also where we might find the first seed which contributed to science fiction's being looked down upon. Even though Jules Verne's fiction contained numerous scientific explanations and plausible technological inventions (such as the submarine), he believed that the key to success was a moderation of imagination, a stance which was encouraged by his publisher, Hetzel, who wanted to aim Verne's novels at young readers (Stableford 20). Thus, being both

popular and aimed at young audiences, science fiction was disregarded by serious critics. Its popularity and success contributed to the general attitude, as I have shown before, that for a cultural good to be perceived as valuable it must be scarce in quantity.

Jules Verne's success inspired other writers from both Europe and America to write science fiction. In the United States, a hybrid between the science fiction and the western genres was created (as seen in the works of Edward Ellis, especially *The Steam Man of the Prairies*, released in 1868), while, in Britain, the genre of future war stories was popularized by writers such as George T Chesney (*The Battle of Doroking* (1871)), Fred T Jane, or M.P. Shiel. Herbert George Wells' novels, at the end of the 19th century, revolutionized science fiction again, as in his stories (most famously *The Time Machine* or *The War of the Worlds*) he does not attempt to make his machines or events plausible, but he expects his audience to take them seriously, without offering any explanations.

As Darko Suvin explains, science fiction is a "literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin 7-8). In his definition, Suvin borrows from German playwright Bertold Brecht, who spoke about estrangement in the context of theater as "a representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (Brecht qtd in Suvin, *Metamorphoses* 7). Thus, Suvin notes that the estrangement Brecht was talking about evolved to become the "formal framework" of science fiction (Suvin 7), its most recognizable and defining trait, which developed at around this time.

Apart from estrangement, Suvin argues that there are other two elements which need to be taken into account when analyzing a science fiction text: "the novum" and "sf's genetic link with utopia" (Suvin, *Metamorphoses* 14). By "novum" (borrowed from Ernst Bloch) Suvin referred to the innovation which distinguishes the fictional world from the real world; the novum has to be both rational and credible, and usually the novum appears in a science fiction text as a result of an experiment, an invention, or a discovery. Utopia comes as a result of criticizing the real world and coming up with an alternative to it. This is influenced by Ernst Bloch's belief that all art and all cultural manifestations are utopian to a certain degree, in that they deny the existing conditions and "wish to make life manageable and pleasurable" (Csicsery-Ronay 119).

At the beginning of the 20th century, science fiction was already a very popular genre, which is demonstrated by the great number of pulp magazines dedicated to the genre. Although, at first, these stories, published in pulp magazines, had original themes and portrayed inventive ways of travelling across space (such as R.M. Farley's *The Radio Man* or Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Under the Moons of Mars*) (Stableford, "Science Fiction" 29), later on the stories became repetitive, typically describing the story of a hero fighting a villain (usually an alien, a monster, or a mad scientist) for the hand of a beautiful woman.

Most pulp science fiction stories followed John Cawelti's recipe of bringing pleasure to the traditional popular reader, which, according to him, requires a combination of adventure, mystery, and romance (Cawelti 1976). In terms of adventure, the most common themes and motifs were those of war with some alien culture, or struggle against a hostile outer space environment. Romance was captured by the beautiful female character, often in danger, hidden by the main villain, and saved by the protagonist at the very last moment. Finally, the mystery was most often scientific (as compared to the thriller or noir story, where the mystery is represented by the lack of information concerning a crime), which must be solved by the protagonist (usually either a young scientist, a space traveler, or an engineer), who has to gather information and have a "conceptual breakthrough" (Stableford, *Science Fact* 353).

The first magazine exclusive for science fiction was Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* (1926), which was meant to educate the readers, as much as entertain them. In addition to the stories themselves, such magazines also had columns dedicated to the latest discoveries in physics, as well as conversation pages in which fans and writers debated the future of the genre (more prominently in John W Campbell Jr.'s *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine in 1937). The entire structure of the magazine, as we can see, was very different from the way in which what is traditionally considered serious literature and art is organized. Firstly, by emphasizing the technological aspect of the texts (many times detrimental to the plot and character construction), science fiction departed from what was considered big literature. This departure can also be perceived in terms of who the audience was made of, as most science fiction readers were not particularly interested in other types of literature. Secondly, as Gary Wolfe argues, the editor played a major role in the way in which the magazine was perceived, standing as a guarantee of the quality of its content (96).

However, this increased importance of the editor brought forth another characteristic which is not frequently discussed in relation to high literature: the economic aspect of writing. Ultimately, the editor's purpose is to sell as many copies as possible. Thus, the capitalist aspect of science fiction further distanced it from the allegedly high literature, which claimed to exist outside economic restrains, for the greater purpose of art for art's sake (as we saw with Adorno and the Frankfurt School). Therefore, it is worth mentioning that the critic was not an important part of the science fiction community. As noted before, the editor stood for the quality of the magazine, and the magazines tended to be filled with opinions coming from fans and scientists rather than critics. Most literary critics had no interest in the genre, disregarding it as low-quality entertainment.

Thus, by having an open and transparent attitude towards its readers, such magazines managed to break the barriers between readers and writers, allowing readers to freely interact with writers. Moreover, they organized competitions for new writers, breaking "down the barrier between professional and fan, writer and reader" (Attebery 32). This collaborative environment was furthermore supported by meetings in which writers and readers debated upon various issues about the genre, acting "more like equal partners than passive consumers" (Attebery 38).

Consequently, while science fiction magazines tried to bring audiences and writers together, such an attitude was inconceivable in the high literary field at the beginning of the 20th century, with its lists of writers, stern critics, and strictly organized university curricula. Besides, while great modernist writers and artists were usually reclusive and locked in their ivory towers, science fiction writers listened to feedback from their audiences. For many modernist and high culture artists, to be understood by the public was a failure (as was the case of modernist avant-garde music), but for science fiction writers, meeting their audiences and listening to them was a way to contribute and work together to create a better genre and overcome the stereotypes. This collaboration led to the evolution of the genre, which became more sophisticated than the original stories published in pulp magazines.

Although science fiction reached a whole new level of popularity in the first half of the 20th century, it is important to emphasize that it did not enjoy the approval of the great majority of readers, and was frequently dismissed as inferior or mocked for its dullness. By extension, those who read science fiction were often ridiculed and classified as infantile. In his essay, "Janeways and Thaneways; the Better Half, and Worse Half, of Science Fiction Television", Gary Westfahl argues that:

> the young nerds attracted to science fiction may have shared the gender and skin-colour of the era's dominant class, but in every other way they were alienated and marginalized members of society, dreaming of domed cities and Martian canals when most people longed for an idealized past and idolized [cowboy icons] Gene Autry and Andy Hardy. If, at that time, you read magazines with pictures of squid-like monsters and built miniature rockets in your backyard, you undoubtedly felt rejected, ridiculed, and out of place. Such people often bond with, and adopt the attitudes of, other members of society who feel rejected, ridiculed, and out of place (Westfahl 32).

Thus, science fiction made such youth feel empowered, and, moreover, it created a community of outsiders with similar interests.

As Adam Roberts further argues, science fiction "is about reading the marginal experience coded through the discourses of material symbolism" (Roberts 19). In other words, the science fiction outsider "allows the symbolic expression of what it is to be female, or black, or otherwise marginalized" (Roberts 19). By othering the alien or the monster, instead of those who are actually marginalized in day-to-day life, science fiction is able to circumvent traditional fiction conventions, and address such issues indirectly. Consequently, this genre seems to offer more freedom to the writer, who is able to openly criticize certain aspects of the society. This may explain its transformation into a powerful tool in Postmodernism, in the hands of social and political movements.

In the postwar period, in the context of the cold war and nuclear fears, Keith Booker argues that science fiction, especially through its technique of defamiliarization, becomes "particularly effective as a method of political commentary" (Keith Booker 27). Thus, its distant settings and unrealistic characters become means of subverting current political ideologies. As Carl Freedman argues, the future in science fiction should not be viewed as

> a specific chronological register, but as a locus of radical alterity to the mundane status quo, which is thus estranged and historicized as the concrete past of potential future. The potential future in science fiction exists, one may say, primarily for the sake of the actual present (Freedman 55)

Accordingly, Keith Booker notes that most science fiction writers chose a political side: some, like Isaac Asimov, Kurt Vonnegut, or Ben Barzman, leaned towards the Left, while others leaned to the Right (Ray Bradbury, and most prominently, Robert Heinlein) (Keith Booker 48).

Starting with the 1960s, revived by Postmodernism, science fiction became a subject of interest in universities. Darko Suvin remembers in an interview his surprise at hearing the news that his students in 1967 were demanding a course on science fiction, saying that "the students wanted a great number of things, from power in the university to Science Fiction courses" (Suvin interviewed by Horst Pukallus). Hence, science fiction becomes an empowering tool in the hands of the youth, who challenge the hierarchy, as they ask for their voices and their beliefs to be heard. Moreover, this attitude made Darko Suvin realize that science fiction has the potential to become marketable not only as a popular currency, but in high culture as well. Once science fiction begins being studied in universities, it can be argued that its path to critical recognition begins.

Postmodern critics, such as Carl Freedman, point out the injustices that have traditionally been done to science fiction, as he claims that by focusing the public perception of science fiction on fictional sagas such as *Star Trek, Star Wars*, or other popular blockbusters, the "dominant canonizers" try to "encourage a superficial understanding of the genre while discouraging serious attention to the authors who could most consequently refute such mystification" (Freedman 87). Thus, he further argues that critics purposefully overlook the science fiction elements present in the works of canonized writers such as George Orwell, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, or even James Joyce (Freedman 88), precisely because of the genre's bad reputation. It appears that they are afraid that, by acknowledging these elements in a masterpiece, the value of the work would automatically drop.

However, the science fiction written in the 1960s seems to have been more sophisticated than ever. As the genre evolved, the writers started experimenting with both form and story in order to create compelling texts, which focused on contemporary issues. Moreover, the new science fiction magazines which developed in the 1950s and 1960s were looking for texts which showed emotional depth, believable characters, and stylistic distinctions, thus departing from the stereotypes attributed to science fiction in the 1920s. Writers such as Walter Miller, Daniel Keyes, Alfred Bester, Ray Bradbury, Philip K Dick, Kurt Vonnegut, Frank Herbert, or Robert Heinlein make their debuts in magazines where they experimented with various literary forms and techniques, as Damien Broderick shows in his article "New Wave and Backwash" (48-64).

In addition to the constant experimentation within the genre, science fiction also becomes a tool for subverting gender roles and prejudices. From a genre blamed for promoting stereotypes, in Postmodernism, science fiction helps with the emancipation of women. Feminist writers such as Anne Caffrey, Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guinn, or Margaret Atwood write about genderless utopian societies or dystopias in which women's rights are taken away. In their works, science fiction is a tool for criticizing contemporary views regarding gender, as can be seen in novels such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* or *Handmaid's Tale*.

2. The Astronaut

The first two related themes we will look at in this chapter are that of the astronaut and of space travel. We will see how they are portrayed in Arthur C Clarke's novel, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation, and in Bowie's albums, *Space Odyssey* and *Blackstar*. We will then proceed to a comparative analysis between the texts, pointing out ways in which they subvert stereotypes or prejudices, according to Postmodernist theory.

Traditionally, science fiction texts often depict astronauts as heroes or humans with almost supernatural capacities, able to survive in unsafe environments, who always prioritize the mission, no matter the circumstances. Astronauts are any time ready to sacrifice themselves for the success of the mission, which is perceived as extremely important for humanity itself. They are also seen as lonely heroes, willing to guard our planet from above, as they leave their personal life, their families, and their communities behind, for the greater good. Highly trained, chosen out of thousands of potential candidates, astronauts serve as role-models in the science fiction community.

2.1. *2001: A Space Odyssey*

Arthur C. Clarke's novel, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as well as the movie adaptation, perfectly exemplifies the exceptional status of the astronaut, as it tells the story of a crew travelling to Jupiter in order to investigate a dubious signal. The novel is divided into three parts, centered around the existence of alien monoliths which act as witnesses or guardians of the human evolution. They seem to ensure the humans' survival, as they watch over them from pre-historical times, up to the moment when they are capable of building weapons of mass destruction, in the Cold War era (which extends up until the year 2001). The following paragraphs will briefly summarize the plot of the novel/movie, as a necessary introduction to the analytical part.

In the first part of the novel, we are introduced to the monolith, as it guards over the evolution of apes, who, for the first time, figure out the importance of tools to their survival. Moon Watcher, the first of his kind, starts using bones or pieces of wood to defend himself and his tribe, as well as kill animals in order to procure food. Thus, he leads the way for the evolutionary path. Once the apes start using the tools on a daily basis, it seems that the monolith has achieved its goal, and it disappears as spontaneously as it appeared. The future humans are left alone to make their own path.

Seemingly, the monoliths appear only at times when the human race is close to extinction, in order to either prevent it from happening or watch it develop. Therefore, the fact that the next monolith appears during the Cold War is not a surprise. Millions of years into the future, the humans have reached the peak of their evolution, and are now capable of creating weapons that are not only meant to defend them, but also have the potential to destroy the entire planet. Hence, the second part of the novel shows the tense relations between the Americans and the Russians, as a new, extraordinary discovery is made on the Moon which may prove once and for all that we are not the only beings in the universe. That discovery is, undoubtedly, the same monolith which appeared to the apes. However, it is not explained whether the monolith has always been there or whether the human technology has just become capable of receiving the signal.

The third and final part of the story introduces us to David Bowman and his crew, who embark om a journey to Jupiter in order to potentially encounter alien life for the first time. Similarly to how the monolith triggered their evolutionary instinct in the apes, HAL, the artificial intelligence on board of the spacecraft seems to be pushed towards evolution by the same vibration

of the monolith. Hence, HAL, the supercomputer that is praised for its precision and accuracy, starts to make mistakes, to doubt itself and its crew, and overall, to become more human. In an attempt to save itself, it kills every member of the crew except for Bowman, who manages to escape and then proceeds to disconnect HAL from the ship. The moment HAL is disconnected from the mainframe is considered one of the most intense cinematic experiences of the entire movie, as we see HAL regressing to a simple computer, begging the astronaut for mercy.

The movie ends with David Bowman descending on one of Jupiter's moons, uncovering what seems like a bigger monolith, similar to the one found on the moon. However, as Bowman descends, he realizes that what he sees is not at all a solid object, but a fracture in the space and time continuum. Unable to go back to the ship, Bowman continues his journey. He lands on what seems to be a hotel room, where he sees his entire life flashing before his eyes, until he regresses, or evolves, into a state of unborn. The movie ends with the image of a fetus guarding over the galaxy, much like a star.

One of the most important aspects of space travel depicted in *2001: A Space Odyssey* is the sense of isolation and loneliness which extrudes through every page or every scene. As opposed to traditional science fiction interplanetary travels, which focus on the grand purpose of the journey, *2001* focuses on the utmost loneliness experienced by the characters, as they become increasingly distanced from their peers. As a result, the novel is an exploration of human loneliness and otherness, embodied by the astronaut and his journey. Moreover, the novel accentuates the perpetual division between people, which is visible even from its inception: humans in the 20th century are not significantly different from apes, and if they were once divided into tribes, now they are divided by the Iron Curtain.

Loneliness seems to engulf every part of the novel. In addition to the division between humans, in the second part of the movie we follow Floyd Heywood's journey from Earth to the Moon. At first, he endures physical loneliness, as he travels alone in big spacecrafts, in both of his travels: from Earth to the Space Station, and from the Space Station to the Moon. Being the only passenger of the aircrafts, Heywood experiences boredom and awe, as he moves among the stars. Further on, he isolates himself from his fellow spacemen on Space Station, as he is not allowed to tell anyone about the Americans' discovery on the moon. In the context of the Cold War, the Soviets and the Americans are divided once again, in space, as they are on Earth.

However, in the last part of the movie, the theme of isolation and loneliness may be the most accentuated. The sense of isolation is showed not only through the physical distance between the crew of Discovery and the other humans on Earth, who are moving further and further away from civilization and everything that is familiar to them, but through the numerous times in which the ship loses contact with Earth due to the supposed issues with the radio and antenna. In the short periods in which Discovery is cut from Earth, the viewer experiences terror at the possibility of leaving the ship stranded in space, with no direction, and no possibility to report back on its findings.

HAL, the artificial intelligence controlling the ship, experiences another type of loneliness. Not only is it a unique exponent of its race, but it is also unable to relate to any of the crew members. For fear of being rejected, it attempts to kill everybody on board, but ends up terminated by David Bowman. After disconnecting HAL, Bowman remains alone on board of Discovery, with no possibility of going back home. Therefore, Bowman faces his destiny all alone, surrounded by stars. As he descends down the monolith, he knows that, from now on, communication will be impossible between him and the rest of the population. Moreover, he is aware that this event is going to completely change him, in a way that is beyond human comprehension. Like HAL, Bowman is bound to become the first of his kind, and, thus, utterly alone.

Another way in which *2001: A Space Odyssey* illustrates the themes of isolation and loneliness is through the cold relationships between characters. The division between humans is visible right from the beginning, as Kubrik and Clark develop the rivalry between the two tribes of apes over the puddle. The same division is witnessed later in the future, when the Soviets and the Americans are divided by an Iron Wall, as they fight over world domination, and even more, space domination. Accordingly, the movie/novel illustrates science fiction's ability to criticize or comment on various contemporary issues, underlining the genre's preoccupation with history.

Moreover, the dull dialogues between characters represent another way in which isolation and loneliness are depicted in the novel. Even the conversation Haywood has over the phone with his daughter seems to lack warmth, as the father quickly dismisses his daughter's questions and instructs her about letting her mother know about the phone call. Furthermore, we are constantly reminded in the last part of the novel that the five crew members of the Discovery are not friends, but "colleagues", who simply trained together. Thus, their death does not seem to have much of an impact on Bowman, other than the fact that he now must explore space in utter loneliness. As

such, we can notice that the connections between people are not based on feelings or emotions, but simply on belonging to the same institutional space.

This coldness is identified by both Joseph Gelmis and Barry Keith Grant as one of the most distinctive features of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Adding to the film's cold tone, Grant argues, are also the "relative death of dialogue, …, slow pace, and sleek production design, which depicts the environments of space travel as thoroughly antiseptic and ordinary" (Grant 69). For Joseph Gelmis, the characters seem to be "near-automatons who surrendered their humanity to computers" (quoted in Palmer 20), which may also explain the reason why HAL, the artificial intelligence, seems more humane than any of the other characters.

2.2 From *Space Odyssey to Space Oddity*

2001: A Space Odyssey captivated Bowie's imagination for years, as his fascination with the themes presented in the movie stayed with Bowie years after *Space Oddity* was released. Much like Ulysses' travels in *The Odyssey* to get back home, which served as inspiration for Clarke and Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey* shows us humans' travels through evolution in order to reach their potential final stage of evolution: through Bowman we become one with the universe. Likewise, David Bowie's artistic career seems to be a similar type of odyssey, which started with *Space Oddity* in 1968 and ended with *Blackstar* in 2016. As I will show later on in this chapter, *Blackstar* represents, much like the final part of Kubrick's movie, the end of a cycle. As such, it depicts the destination of an endless journey.

The fact that Kubrick's movie served as main inspiration for David Bowie's hit song, *Space Oddity*, is no surprise, as the singer mentioned in numerous interviews the powerful impact watching the movie had on him: "It was the sense of isolation I related to. I found the whole thing amazing", he confessed in an interview for Classic Rock in 2012 (qtd in Doggett 54). Thus, in his hit song, *Space Oddity*, released in 1969, we encounter the same feelings of isolation and loneliness that pervade Clarke's odyssey.

However, in Bowie's song, the focus changes from the journey to the weirdness of the situation and to the artifice, as Bowie has always been interested in exploring the depths of the human psyche rather than the depths of space. He revealed in a 1997 interview for MTV that, although throughout his career he is known to have used science fiction tropes such as aliens, astronauts, or superhumans, his only interest in them was due to their ability to embody "otherness" and "alienation", having the capacity to become "cyphers" for isolation and alienation (David Bowie, interview by MTV 1997). The same can be said about *Space Oddity,* in which the idea of space travel, in Bowie's terms, resembles a spiritual search, rather than the search for actual aliens. As Bowie's biographer, David Buckley, argues that "far from simply being a cash-in single, *Space Oddity* was the first indication of Bowie's interest in outer space as a metaphor for inner space" (Buckley 60).

The title of the song is also a mark of the humanization of space travel: it is not the space itself, or the interstellar journey, which is the oddity, but the protagonist of the song, Major Tom. Much like Haywood Floyd's lonely voyage, Major Tom takes off into space all alone, to a

destination that the listener is not aware of. Although, at first, he thoroughly communicates with "Ground Control", the connection is soon to be severed, and Major Tom left to drift away in space, farther and farther from Earth. Major Tom's journey resembles David Bowman's, as they both are propelled into the unknown, with no ability to contact home and let anybody know about their discoveries. Closer to home than Bowman, Major Tom voices his uselessness and absurd situation as he sings "Planet Earth is blue / And there's nothing I can do" (Bowie, *Space Oddity*). In the same way in which Bowman is reborn as a starchild, watching over Earth, Major Tom achieves a sort of omnipresence and detachment, looking at the distant planet.

Even though David Bowman and Major Tom seem to have a lot in common when it comes to their ultimate destination, the ways in which they are constructed and the professionalism they display differ quite significantly. Thus, we know that Bowman was one of the chosen few to be part of the five members of the Discovery crew. He is highly trained and selected because of both his knowledge and physical strength. His dedication is visible in his daily routine on the ship, as he meticulously trains his body (jogging around the ship), and then reads the newest scientific articles regarding space travel hardware. Moreover, he sometimes tests his knowledge against the artificial intelligence onboard, HAL, with whom he also occasionally plays chess. He is organized and motivated, and he hardly ever lets go of his routine.

Major Tom, on the other hand, seems Bowman's complete opposite. Even though we cannot know for sure what his level of training is, he seems perplexingly unprepared for what space travel is supposed to mean. Unlike the traditional science fiction astronaut, armed with both wisdom and strength, Major Tom behaves more like a child who got himself in a spaceship by accident. He calls his spaceship "tin can", and is rather surprised by the way in which the lack of gravity is affecting his body (a situation for which he should have been more than prepared after the countless simulations professional astronauts normally go through before departure):

> Though I'm past 1000000 miles
> I'm feeling very still
> And I think my spaceship knows which way to go (Bowie, *Space Oddity*).

Thus, it could be argued that *Space Oddity* shows a more Postmodern concern with surface and depthlessness, as Jameson shows in his *Postmodern Condition*.

Major Tom also displays a ludic and easy-going view on life, common for the post-hippie period. In this sense, the character is more approachable and more relatable to the average people than the astronauts portrayed in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This seems to reinforce the idea that in Postmodernism anybody can become an astronaut, in the same way in which anybody can become an artist. The reason behind Bowie's decision to make Major Tom more identifiable with has to do with his dissatisfaction of the dehumanized traditional image of the astronaut. He claims in an interview that "the publicity image of a spaceman at work is of an automaton rather than a human being" (Bowie qtd in Doggett 54). Thus, in his song, Bowie attempts to make his astronaut as human as possible. The sense of relatedness also shows the shift from the focus on the creator in traditional art, to the focus on the audience. In other words, Bowie wants the people (the listeners) to perceive Major Tom as one of them, seeking acceptance for his character.

While Kubrik's and Clark's *2001: A Space Odyssey* was praised for its accurate depictions of space travel, Bowie's *Space Oddity* resembles a parody rather than an actual depiction of space travel. Continuing to employ Postmodern techniques such as the pastiche, Bowie's lyrics seem to be an amalgam of unrelated space vocabulary. Thus, he names his protagonist Tom, one of the commonest and most ordinary English names, and does not even provide a family name for him, as it is the norm in scientific institutions. Consequently, Ground Control addresses the astronaut as "Major Tom" rather than the rank followed by the family name (major Smith, for example). In this way, the character appears more relatable to the audience. In Postmodernist terms, it could be argued that Bowie deconstructs the myth of the astronaut, by getting rid of its aura: he is not a highly trained scientist or engineer, he is just one of us, an ordinary Tom.

In addition to this, as David Buckley notes, a multitude of terms are used incorrectly throughout the song, leading to a depiction of Bowie's lyrics as "childlike and quaint" (Buckley 61). For example, he uses "'ground control' for 'mission control', 'space ship' for 'rocket', 'Major Tom' instead of, perhaps, 'Commander Tom' …, and 'countdown instead of 'ignition sequence'" (Buckley 61). The childlike feel of the song is completed by the nursery rhyme melody, with the same chords repeating over and over again. These issues display, once more, a Postmodernist preoccupation with surfaces.

Moreover, the discussion which takes place between Major Tom and Ground Control, and which makes up the entirety of the song, is also unexpectedly inadequate for the context. Unlike the discussion between Bowman and mission control, which, although cold and impersonal, seems

respectful and restricted only to vital information, Ground Control's conversation with Major Tom appears to be rather childlike and absurd. After guiding Major Tom through the countdown, Ground Control displays unprofessional childlike enthusiasm when receiving the news Major Tom exited the Earth's orbit: "You've really made the grade!" (Bowie, *Space Oddity*). Thus, Ground Control is surprised by something which should have been scientifically calculated, which shows that they rely on luck rather than science.

The first question that Ground Control asks Major Tom after he exists Earth's atmosphere is even more trivial than the previous remarks, as they inquire the astronaut about his shirt: "And the papers want to know whose shirt you wear" (Bowie, *Space Oddity*). The focus on the media and on the way in which information is being disseminated is visible not only in Bowie's song, but in *2001: A Space Odyssey* as well. After HAL announces the ship's issue with the AE-35 Unit, mission control asks Bowman and Poole to write a statement for the press in order to calm people down. However, Major Tom's relationship with the media seems entirely different, as he is not asked to provide vital information regarding the mission, but "whose shirt you wear", referring probably to either a football team or a fashion brand. Such a behavior depicts the way in which mass media attempts to infantilize mature audiences through the commercial use of superstars. Major Tom is not an emblem of knowledge, but a mere celebrity.

Thus, it could be concluded that this song portrays the ability of Postmodernism to turn anybody into a superstar, giving them their fifteen minutes of fame, as Andy Warhol claimed in a different context. Hence, Warhol's quote could be modified by arguing that everybody can be an astronaut for fifteen minutes or that everybody can be a scientist for fifteen minutes. In other words, Major Tom's travel turned him into a popular idol rather than a symbol of science. As such, the fascination of the masses for the superstar is again emphasized in this song.

The concept of institutional space, as explained by Stephen Mamber in his essay, "Kubrick in Space", is also satirized in Bowie's song. According to Mamber, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* we encounter seven types of spaces: "1. Institutional- official space, 2. Ritual- game-war space, 3. Parody space, 4. Dream space, 5. Alien space, 6. Geometrical space, and 7. Ubiquitous space" (56). Mamber offers as examples for institutional spaces the waiting rooms in the Space Orbit, the restaurant where Soviet and American officials are avoiding each other or engaging in small talk, or the multitude of offices through which Heywood Floyd passes. Stephen Mamber interestingly notes that these institutional spaces have a big impact on the people inside them, as he says that

"people will be dominated, controlled, made to look small by the strongly prevailing institutional environments. The house, the room, the office will win" (58).

In *Space Oddity*, the only institutional space we encounter is Ground Control's command room, where Major Tom receives his directions from. Guiding Major Tom's every single move, like a parent looking over a very frail child, Ground Control seems to possess the astronaut in the same way in which Mamber describes institutional places taking over the people in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Only when the connection to mission control is lost, do Major Tom and David Bowman finally become free, cut from their official duties. Thus, the severing of the connection could also be seen as a detachment from tradition or from authority. In this way, science fiction's potential as a tool against the establishment is once again underlined.

2.3 Drugs, Astronauts, and Rock'n'Roll

Freedom is a problematic concept, however, in both *Space Oddity and 2001: A Space Odyssey*, as Ciment spoke about the paradox of space in Kubrick's film. According to him, despite "a desire to open up his sets as far as possible … they remain nevertheless prisons" (75). Thus, the vaster the space presented in the movie, the smaller it actually is, as it is filled with emptiness and void. *2001*'s characters are prisoners in the most open space possible, tied to their ship. The claustrophobic sensation is emphasized when, for example, we see Bowman jogging around the ship, in what looks like a hamster wheel. In another example, the scientists on the Moon isolate themselves from the monolith with tape, in order to keep their discovery a secret. In a similar vein, Major Tom calls his spaceship a "tin can", pointing out that it is a closed space, which restricts the movement rather than confer freedom.

The freedom that both Bowman and Major Tom experience once they are cut from mission control, as discussed before, can also be linked to the counterculture of the 1960s and the role drugs played in the life of the youth. Many critics, upon viewing the movie upon its release, disregarded it, calling it "dull" (Kauffman qtd in Palmer 19), "just plain boring" (Renata Adler 208), or "trash" (Kael 100). Although the film did not appeal to critics, it generated a burst of excitement in youth communities, as young people rushed to see the movie in the cinema. The reason for the youth's interest in the movie was interpreted at the time, as film critic Pauline Kael claimed, as a consequence of the movie's ability to "stone" you with its boring visual effects, especially in the third part (Kael 101). She claims that "the tribes' tune is so fast that college students thousands of miles apart 'have heard' what a great trip *2001* is before it has even reached their city" (100).

Space travel understood as acid trip is also hinted at in *Space Oddity*. Major Tom's passivity and his bewilderment at banal things, such as the planet's color, can also be a consequence of drug intake. Moreover, the entire absurd discussion between Ground Control and Major Tom would make more sense if we imagine it as one between two delirious people, who articulate nonsensical scenarios, based on the science fiction movies or stories they read. The moment Major Tom's and Ground Control's connection is severed, the astronaut seems surprisingly at peace with the entire situation, as he sings:

Though I'm past one hundred thousand miles,
I'm feeling very still
And I think my spaceship knows which way to go.
Tell my wife I love her very much (David Bowie, *Space Oddity*)

This scene is reminiscent of the serene and tranquil sensations experienced after drug use. In other words, Major Tom is not high in the sky, but high in his head.

This interpretation is supported by David Bowie himself, who, ten years later, brings updates regarding his astronaut's trip. He opens his 1980 single *Ashes to Ashes* with the lines:

Do you remember a guy that's been
In such an early song
I've heard a rumour from Ground Control (David Bowie, *Ashes to Ashes*)

Consequently, it seems that Bowie is set on retelling Major Tom's tale, as seen through his adult eyes. This time, however, Bowie does not hide behind vague references, and he clearly speaks out about Major Tom's drug addiction:

Ashes to ashes, funk to funky
We know Major Tom's a junkie
Strung out in heaven's high
Hitting an all-time low

Time and again I tell myself
I'll stay clean tonight
But the little green wheels are following me
Oh, no, not again (David Bowie, *Ashes to Ashes*).

Hence, in this song we are faced with the reality behind the whimsical space odyssey depicted in *Space Oddity*. The protagonist of the song is now a middle-aged, bald man, who has financial issues as a consequence of long-time drug abuse: "And I ain't got no money and I ain't got no hair", as the narrator whines in the song (David Bowie, *Ashes to Ashes*). The idleness presented in *Space Oddity* is also deconstructed, leading the protagonist to live with the sense that

he has not managed to achieve anything in his lifetime: “My mama said, ‘To get things done / You'd better not mess with Major Tom’” (David Bowie, *Ashes to Ashes*).

In an interview for NME, in September 1980, Bowie argued that this song represents “a story of corruption”, “an ode to childhood, … about space men becoming junkies” (Bowie, *NME* 1980). Furthermore, he reveals the autobiographical elements displayed in this song, as he revisits his condition as both an artist and a popstar. Thus, he expresses the difficulty in trying to still be relevant and challenging as an internationally established superstar. In other words, he seems dissatisfied with his new status, which he compares to the museumification to the avant-garde, as he says : “I have this great long chain with a ball of middle-classness at the end of it which keeps holding me back and that I keep sort of trying to fight through. I keep trying to find the Duchamp in me, which is harder and harder to find” (Bowie, *NME* 1980).

In this interview, we witness Bowie’s awareness of what Dick Hebdige calls the assimilation of subculture into popular culture, both in its ideological form and in its commodity form (Hebdige, “Subculture” 356), as more amply discussed in the theoretical chapter. *Ashes to Ashes*’ lyrics, according to Bowie, are meant to be just another instance of being subversive and trying to undermine the main media discourse of the time. As Bowie claims, the lyrics are

> about as subversive as one can get in popular music terms inasmuch as I would love to get a record played by the BBC containing the word ‘junkie’. I thought that was quite successful (*grins*). There's not much you can do these days; we're all such a blasé, world weary lot (*laughs*) (Bowie, *NME* 1980).

Thus, Bowie compares the fate of Major Tom to that of what he perceives as the state of subculture at that time. In the 1980s, it seemed that everything which used to be subversive or rebellious in the 1970s was widely accepted and part of popular culture. The popular culture of the time, in particular the musical one, was livelier than ever: colorful, empowering, and liberating. It was no longer unusual for artists to admit their sexual orientation, while stage costumes, worn by either men or women, were androgynous and completely over the top. High heels for both men and women became common, while men often wore dresses or skirts on stage or in videos. It is important to emphasize that such attitudes became the standard in popular music in the 1980s, and they were no longer regarded as a rebellious act, as it had been in the 1970s.

While we will discuss more about the Bowie subculture in the following section, when we refer to Ziggy Stardust, it is worth underlining the reasons behind Bowie's apathetic attitude. Much like the avant-gardists refused to release works after their ossification in the canon and in the museum (see Duchamp's case), Bowie seems to slowly get integrated into a culture against which he rebelled throughout his career up to that point. This is evident if we look at Bowie's hit songs from the 1980s, such as *Let's Dance, Tonight*, or *China Girl*, which make him undistinguishable from any other pop star of the time.

Ultimately, Bowie claims that a lot has changed in his personal life and in the world since he has written *Space Oddity*. He argues that "when I originally wrote about Major Tom I was a very pragmatic and self-opinionated lad that thought I knew all about the great American dream and where it started and where it should stop" (Bowie, *NME* 1980). Accordingly, *Ashes to Ashes* subverts the original optimism and innocence that is depicted in Major Tom's original story, as it criticizes the American dream and his fascination with Americana altogether:

> Here we had the great blast of American technological know-how shoving this guy up into space and once he gets there he's not quite sure why he's there. And that's where I left him. Now we've found out that he's under some kind of realisation that the whole process that got him up there had decayed, was born out of decay; it has decayed him and he's in the process of decaying. But he wishes to return to the nice, round womb, the earth, from whence he started (Bowie, *NME* 1980).

Arguably, like Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*, in *Ashes to Ashes*, Major Tom seems to have finally reached his destination. However, once he does that, he realizes that everything has changed and nothing is as he remembers it. Hence, Major Tom's story also illustrates the loss of innocence which cannot be ever regained.

Bowie's use of the astronaut as a symbol for youth empowerment and drug use, however, does not stop with *Ashes to Ashes*. In 1995, Bowie goes back to this theme with the song *Hallo Spaceboy*, from the *1.Outside* album. More evident in the Pet Shop Boys remix, which was eventually released as a single, it seems like *Hallo Spaceboy* completes Major Tom's saga. As Neil Tennant confessed in an interview for the New Musical Express (NME) in 2017, they did the remix by cutting up and rearranging the lyrics of *Space Oddity*. He says: "We completed the Major Tom trilogy: 'Space Oddity', 'Ashes To Ashes' and suddenly 'Hallo Spaceboy'. I said to David Bowie,

‘It’s like Major Tom is in one of those Russian spaceships they can’t afford to bring down,’ and he said, ‘Oh wow, is that where he is?’” (Tennant, *NME* 2017).

Hence, Bowie opens *Hallo Spaceboy* with a short meditation on the youth fascination for everything outrageous, illegal, or with the celebrity lifestyle. He sings: “If I fall, moondust will cover me, moondust will cover me...” and then he introduces the young spaceboy to the listener:

> Spaceboy, you're sleepy now
> Your silhouette is so stationary
> You're released, but your custody calls
> And I wanna be free
> Don't you wanna be free?
> Do you like girls or boys?
> It's confusing these days
> But moondust will cover you (David Bowie, Pet Shop Boys *Hallo Spaceboy*).

Accordingly, Bowie is back to one of the original themes of Kubrick and Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*: the issue of freedom. As we have seen above, for youth subcultures drugs were perceived as a way to achieve freedom and depart from one’s body in order to achieve a sense of floating and reunite with a greater consciousness. In this sense, David Bowman’s descent into the monolith is comparable to Major Tom’s aimless drifting in space. *Hallo Spaceboy*, on the other hand, seems to be a direct address to the young person and his or her interests.

The connection to Major Tom, however, is made more evident in the second verse of the song, as Neil Tennant and David Bowie exchange lines:

> Ground to Major, bye bye Tom
> *This chaos is killing me*
> Dead the circuit, countdown's wrong
> *This chaos is killing me*
> Planet Earth, is control on?
> *So sleepy now* (David Bowie, Pet Shop Boys, *Hallo Spaceboy*).

In this manner, *Hallo Spaceboy* depicts the tension between the exhausted youth voice and a more established authoritarian one, who appears to be mocking the former. It could be argued that this song also reinforces the cycle of a youth subculture, from its incipient enthusiasm to its demise and incorporation in the dominant culture. Once again, Major Tom's childish' and innocent view on life is deconstructed. Moreover, the repetition of the verse "This chaos is killing me" represents the protagonist's slow realization that all youth subcultures fail because, ultimately, those young people turn into adults. Therefore, although he is sleepy and seems exhausted, his efforts will not remain unacknowledged, as "moondust" slowly covers his legacy.

2.4 *Blackstar*: Popular Culture as a Replacement for Religion

David Bowie's final album, *Blackstar*, is another instance in which the astronaut reappears in the singer's repertoire. If *Space Oddity* left Major Tom stranded in space, *Ashes to Ashes* revealed that all was just a dazed vision, and *Hallo Spaceboy* focused on the ephemeral nature of youth cultures, in *Blackstar* we encounter the astronaut once again, but this time he is viewed through a different lens. He is no longer young. For what matters, he is not even alive: covered in moondust, the astronaut's suit becomes a disembodied symbol for the superstar.

Arguably, the video for *Blackstar*, released in the autumn of 2015, could be read as a modern retelling of Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The first scene introduces the viewer to the astronaut, who is now lying lifeless next to a rock. As the image zooms in, it focuses on the astronaut's helmet, revealing an embellished skull glittering inside the carcass. This relic is then discovered by an alien girl, who takes it to her tribe and, in this way, the skull becomes a religious symbol for a new civilization. Much like the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which passively observes the apes' evolution, the astronaut's remains witness the emergence of a new society. By the end of the video, the primitive civilization has evolved, and that can be observed in the disappearance of the tail from their anatomical body.

Although the setting is a science fiction one, this song and video offer yet another reflection of popular culture. If in *Space Oddity* we saw Major Tom reaching a superstar status, in *Blackstar*, popular icons are treated as sanctified assets. Similarly to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where the monolith, as Barton Palmer argues, "begins to represent something of a deity" (Palmer 21), influencing the apes' body movements, the human skull appears to take over the humanoids' body, as they start trembling and doing movements which are comparable to a dance. This behavior is accompanied by the narrator's lyrics, who enumerates various types of stars:

> I can't answer why (I'm a blackstar)
> Just go with me (I'm not a filmstar)
> I'ma take you home (I'm a blackstar)
> Take your passport and shoes (I'm not a popstar)
> And your sedatives, boo (I'm a blackstar)
> You're a flash in the pan (I'm not a marvel star)
> I'm the Great I Am (I'm a blackstar) (David Bowie, *Blackstar*).

Hence, the video and lyrics serve as a commentary on the status of popular culture, which, with its great number of celebrities and superstars, promises eternal salvation to their followers. The Blackstar assures his listeners that if they follow him they will get the sense of familiarity and comfort they crave, emphasizing that while they are momentary beings ("a flash in the pan"), his power is godly ("I'm the Great I Am").

David Bowie addressed this issue in numerous interviews, as he argues that, in Postmodernity, popular culture became a replacement for dead metanarratives such as religion. Accordingly, once religion dead, people have turned to popular culture and superstars to fill their spiritual needs. He says:

> I think people have a real need for some spiritual life and I think there's great spiritual starving going on. There's a hole that's been vacated by an authoritative religious body - the Judeo-Christian ethic doesn't seem to embrace all the things that people actually need to have dealt with in that way - and it's sort of been left to popular culture to soak up the leftover bits like violence and sex. (Bowie, *Esquire Magazine* 1995).

Furthermore, in another interview, he argues that popular culture is:

> our gladiatorial arena; it's where we fight our fears and 'Problems. That's why we've got our Stallones. I don't think it's gratuitous at all, it's necessary. More strength to it, I say. Make 'em bigger, bloodier and sexier, otherwise we'll never get out of the Twentieth Century alive. It's pagans all the way to the finish line. (David Bowie, *Seconds Magazine* 1995).

Therefore, in Bowie's view, popular culture is a necessary tool for keeping a society healthy. In addition to being a place where meanings are negotiated, as I have argued in the theoretical chapter, popular culture is also the place where people come to unload.

Bowie's arguments seem to reinforce Durkheim's belief that anything can become sacred. Rochberg Halton also claims that, depending on the context, "commodities can become de-commodified and receive symbolic charge, which makes them 'sacred to their users'" (Featherstone 119). In other words, the belief that a consumer culture is unable to have any spiritual depth, focusing only on surfaces and materialistic pleasures, is unsubstantial. As Michael Feathersone points out, Postmodernist events such as stadium concerts, Live Aid concerts, or

certain ceremonies are "practices which generate and regenerate sacred symbols … which convey solidarity in small groups, or between friends and lovers" (Featherstone 120). Such events are capable of generating intense feelings of excitement and awe, comparable to those evoked by religious ceremonies (Featherstone 120).

Consequently, Bowie's *Blackstar* mixes religious and popular culture elements up to a point where the two can no longer be distinguished. The general prayer tone of the melody, reminiscent of Gregorian chants, reinforces the ideal of ritual and reverence. Certain phrases are repeated throughout the song, akin to traditional religious hymns:

> In the villa of Ormen, in the villa of Ormen
> Stands a solitary candle,
> In the centre of it all, in the centre of it all
> Your eyes (David Bowie, *Blackstar*).

Moreover, the protagonist of the video, the narrator who is singing the prayer, is evidently built upon Christ-like similarities. Thus, the narrative is divided analogously to the Bible, into an Old Testament and a New Testament.

The first part of the video, corresponding to the Old Testament, comprises a story of genesis: on a distant planet, a holy relic is discovered and brought into the village by a Chosen Woman. This generates various rituals and ceremonies, constructed around the embellished skull (the embellishment of the skull itself is a reference to Christian practices such as the holy relics). As this part of the video unfolds, the button-eyed prophet announces the coming of a great savior, for which a candle stays lit. Like many traditional Judeo-Christian prophets, the Blackstar prophet is blind, or has his eyes covered. This may be a result of his having seen into the future, or having seen too much, which has made him lose interest in the surrounding reality. Although his eyes are blind, he can see more than those around him.

The second half of the video, representative of the New Testament, centers upon the miracle of the death and resurrection of the prophet, and it is filled with Christian imagery: in addition to the prophet, we see the appearance of the holy book, as well as the crucifixion scenes, towards the end of the video. The rebirth is described by the button-eyed prophet as follows:

> Something happened on the day he died

Spirit rose a metre and stepped aside
Somebody else took his place, and bravely cried
(I'm a blackstar, I'm a blackstar) (David Bowie, *Blackstar*).

Undoubtedly, this is the moment when the Blackstar savior is born. As we have seen above, through his doctrine he offers eternal salvation to those who follow him. Besides, in the following lines, he reveals more about his true nature:

I'm a blackstar, way up, on money, I've got game
I see right, so wide, so open-hearted pain
I want eagles in my daydreams, diamonds in my eyes
(I'm a blackstar, I'm a blackstar)
……..
I can't answer why (I'm not a gangstar)
But I can tell you how (I'm not a flam star)
We were born upside-down (I'm a star's star)
Born the wrong way 'round (I'm not a white star)
I'm a blackstar, I'm not a gangstar
I'm a blackstar, I'm a blackstar
I'm not a pornstar, I'm not a wandering star
I'm a blackstar, I'm a Blackstar (David Bowie, *Blackstar*).

The manner in which the savior describes himself concedes the fact that he is, in fact, a pop icon, concerned with boasting about money and lavish lifestyle, adamant about upward social mobility.

Moreover, the absorption of religion into popular culture is made visible through yet another reference in the song, its leading symbol, the "Blackstar". *Blackstar* is the original title of an Elvis Presley song, released as *Flaming Star* in 1960. In the original song, Elvis correlates the black star to death, as he sings:

Every man has a black star
A black star over his shoulder
And when a man sees his black star
He knows his time, his time has come (Elvis Presley, *Black Star*)

Undeniably, Elvis was one of the greatest pop idols to have ever existed, thus Bowie's reference to him in this song is no surprise. The level of adoration and devotion which Elvis generated in the 1960s was unprecedented, comparable only to religious leaders' such as Jesus Christ, Buddha, or Muhammad.

However, in the video, Bowie also hints at political leaders who gained incommensurable power through their charisma, in particular communist and Nazi ones. The power to appeal to people on a large scale lies at the basis of popular culture, and charismatic ideologues have been able to use it to their advantage. David Bowie addressed this issue in a controversial interview for Playboy in 1975, where he claimed that:

> Rock stars are fascists. Adolf Hitler was one of the first rock stars. Look at some of his films and see how he moved. I think he was quite as good as Jagger. It's astounding. And boy, when he hit that stage, he worked an audience. Good God! He was no politician. He was a media artist. He used politics and theatrics and created this thing that governed and controlled the show for 12 years. The world will never see his like again. He staged a country … People aren't very bright, you know? They say they want freedom, but when they get the chance, they pass up Nietzsche and choose Hitler because he would march into a room to speak and music and lights would come on at strategic moments. It was rather like a rock 'n roll concert. The kids would get very excited — girls got hot and sweaty and guys wished it was them up there. That, for me, is the rock 'n roll experience (Bowie, *Playboy* 1975).

The tabloid media of the time, and not only, rushed to accuse Bowie of being a fascist following that interview. On the contrary, I believe that he simply pointed out the tremendous power popular culture can have over people, arguing that Hitler gained his followers by employing popular culture-like techniques rather than via his political ideas. In this sense, he seems to acknowledge Theodor Adorno's fears regarding art's absorption into politics.

Hence, the imagery surrounding the prophet's birth in *Blackstar* resembles communist propaganda, as it can be observed in the following shot:



Figure 1. Still from Renck, *Blackstar*

The prophet finds legitimization in the holy book, which is treated as the ultimate repository of truth.

All in all, the astronaut in Bowie's *Blackstar* formulates yet another commentary on the role of popular culture. Popular culture is not simply mass culture, which offers no gratification, but, as Bowie has argued, it serves as a way for people to satisfy their spiritual needs. By reinstating itself instead of religion, popular culture has gained status as a moral legislator, similar to the social role the Church used to play. Religion having become increasingly fragmented, popular culture seems to be the only one which has the capacity to unite once again.

2.5 Critical Reception: Between Pretentious Youth and Popular Culture

As emphasized in the theoretical chapter, the 1950s and the 1960s were marked by avid debates regarding popular culture. The young Postmodernist artists were destabilizing the cultural scene more and more, influenced by what was considered inferior or kitsch. Released in 1968 (*2001: A Space Odyssey*) and 1969 (*Space Oddity*), the two space-related works received mixed reviews, most of them capturing the prominent cultural views of the time. Thus, in order to exemplify the nature of the *high versus low* debate at that moment, as well as to show the degree to which science fiction is a type of culture that empowers youth, I believe that it is paramount to overview the critical reception of the movie and the song.

2001: A Space Odyssey received a lot of mixed reviews upon its release. Although it was widely loved by (especially young) audiences, the movie was deemed "pretentious" and "dull" by traditional critics (Palmer 19). The reason why the movie was rejected by critics, according to Robert Palmer, is because it revolutionized the science fiction genre, breaking the barriers between high and low culture (17). Thereupon, Palmer explains, in the 1960s there was a clear distinction between movies as entertainment and movies as artistic expressions (17). While artistic movies were "serious, edifying rather than enjoyable, and European (or, at least, foreign) [,] Celluloid entertainment was what Hollywood provided" (Palmer 17).

Kubrick's movie, however, refused to fit into the pattern of what was supposed to be an entertaining Hollywood movie. Pauline Kael attacked the movie, as she saw the line between true art and entertainment broken. She criticized Kubrick for attempting to make such a movie "artistic", while also making it entertaining. Such a combination, in her view, leads to pretentiousness and failure to achieve both, the movie becoming simply "trash" (127). However, Kael was accused for having an outmoded understanding of art, and she was heavily criticized for it by Palmer, who blamed her for keeping art on a pedestal (Palmer 23).

Other critics disapproved of the movie due to its ambiguity and lack of a linear plot. Stanley Kauffman believes it is simply boring for not explaining itself to the audience through voice over or text (quoted in Palmer 19). However, he acknowledges Kubrick's ingenuity, as he applauds him for the "supposed failure to adhere to the customary canons of cinematic correctness" (quoted in Palmer 18). Gelmis, another film critic, praised the movie for its thematic originality, as he believed that this was precisely the reason it was not properly recognized by critics, as it upset "the

members of the critical establishment because it exists outside their framework of apprehending and describing movies" (266).

Hence, the multitude of opposed opinions regarding *A Space Odyssey*'s status illustrates, once again, the division of the cultural scene in the 1960s. Whilst some critics see the potential of such cultural goods to at last dismantle the distinction between high and low, and make the popular culture field more diverse, others are displeased with this attempt, and they blame Kubrick for being snobbish. Moreover, the fact that a popular movie would borrow elements from high culture seems incomprehensible to such critics, who see it as an almost sacrilegious act.

The same concerns surround Bowie's *Space Oddity* release, which was downgraded because it was assumed that the song was simply a consumerist attempt to gain fame. In the context of mass-media's space obsession of the time, concerning Apollo 11's mission, Bowie's song was perceived as merely a way to take advantage of that. For instance, Tony Visconti, Bowie's producer at the time, refused to produce *Space Oddity*, claiming it is a "cheap-shot to cash in on the Apollo 11 moon landing" (Buckley 55). Moreover, he was displeased with the lyrics, which, in his eyes, lacked Bowie's witty and intellectual remarks. Consequently, Visconti's stance is a reinforcement of the idea that a cultural good cannot be both intellectual and popular at the same time.

However, Tony Visconti's interpretation of the song was not completely accurate. As seen above, the simplicity of *Space Oddity*'s lyrics serves a certain role, and their innocence is intentional. In other words, the lyrics are not a demonstration of bad writing, but they are rather meant to provide the listener with a sense of outlandish or inadequate mood. As Bowie claimed after the release of *Ashes to Ashes*, the lines "I never done good things / I never done bad things / I never did anything out of the blue" (Bowie *Ashes to Ashes*) are meant to "represent a continuing, returning feeling of inadequacy over what I've done" (Bowie, *NME* 1980). This particular sense of inadequacy is well depicted in *Space Oddity*, through the lyrics as well as the melody.

Moreover, in *The Man Who Sold the World*, biographer Peter Doggett shows that Bowie was well aware of the philosophical context regarding the themes of isolation and loneliness which he wished to portray in his song. He argues that Bowie "devoured" existential literature, in particular "Camus, Sartre, and Genet", and that fueled his interest in themes such as the "individual's alienation from society, and from himself" (55). Thus, the anti-intellectualist claim

that Bowie simply wrote lyrics unaware of the greater philosophical discussions and for the sole purpose of making money proves unjustified.

Nonetheless, *Space Oddity* did not enjoy the commercial success Tony Visconti predicted. It gathered little attention upon its release, and not only did it not make it to soundtrack Apollo 11's moon landing, but it was completely banned on BBC due to its pessimistic lyrics. The song only gained popularity after the crew of Apollo 11 returned safely to Earth, when BBC also lifted the ban on the song. David Bowie was surprised by the amount of times the song was played on TV, especially in relation to the moon landing. He seemed amused by the situation, as he declared in an interview in 1969: "I'm sure they really weren't listening to the lyric at all; it wasn't a pleasant thing to juxtapose against a moon landing" (Bowie quoted in DeMain 59).

3. The Alien as the Outsider

The third part of this chapter is going to provide an in-depth look at the way in which science fiction aliens in Postmodernism serve as foils for outsiders and marginalized groups. Similarly to the previous section, this is going to be an interdisciplinary and intertextual study, as we are going to focus on various, interrelated symbolic aliens. Accordingly, we are going to integrate Thomas Jerome Newton, the protagonist of Walter Tevis' novel *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1967) and Bowie's character Ziggy Stardust into the greater discussion of the alien as an outsider. We are also going to discuss Nicolas Roeg's movie adaptation of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), in which David Bowie played the part of Newton, as well as David Bowie's and Enda Walsh' musical *Lazarus*, released in 2016, which continues Newton's saga, forty years later. Hence, we are going to focus on the differences between the alien's portrayal in these different texts, as we emphasize the ways in which aliens have become tools for empowering the marginal other.

Stories of outer worldly visitors have fascinated our literature for hundreds of years. Aliens, angels, prophets, or monsters have been said to visit Earth, as Loughlin observes that "heavenly visitations have not ceased in the long history of human storytelling, though the names of the visitors have changed, as also the places from where they come" (Loughlin 229). Whether their intentions were "peaceful", "confrontational", or nonexistent, as Huntington categorizes them (60), encounters with aliens have always provided opportunities for meditations on human nature. Henceforth, it could be argued that fictional alien encounters have always revealed more about us than about whatever alien race was invading/aiding us.

For Beehler, the story of the alien encounter is always one about borders. He argues that, similarly to the way in which a state protects its frontiers by "externalizing" or "internalizing" outsiders, in the case of fictional alien encounters, the human also needs to clearly define the alien in relation to himself or herself. In other words, for the human to have secure borders, "the alien must be given a clearly defined role to play or a job to do, to aid in anthropology's ongoing documentary on man" (Beehler 34). Therefore, the alien is nothing but an excuse for the human to get to know himself or herself better. Moreover, as Rabkin and Slusser claim,

> the alien is the creation of a need – man's need to designate something that is genuinely outside himself, something that is truly nonman, that has no initial relation to man except

> for the fact that it has no relation. … through learning to relate to the alien, man has learnt to study himself. (Slusser, Rabkin 6)

Consequently, by being radically different, the alien provides the human with the perfect opportunity for self-reflection. Ducommun reinforces this claim, as he points out that, in science fiction, the alien allows us to "get the outer point of view we cannot get when we remain inside the circle" (43).

On that account, the following sections are meant to provide a comparative analysis of Thomas Jerome Newton and Ziggy Stardust, as we discuss the ways in which they bolster a confrontation with alterity, and thus empower that which is perceived as marginal. We are going to show how these aliens illustrate Elena Gomel's claim that, in the context of posthumanism, science fiction is the equivalent of a "testing-ground for new forms of subjectivity and narrativity", as different types of aliens embody "different modalities of ethical response to the presence of alterity in the Universe" (Gomel 4).

As David Bowie claimed in various interviews, stories of outsiders have fascinated him from a very young age. TV series such as *The Stardust Cowboy* or Philip K Dick's novel, *The World Jones Made,* heavily influenced his early career, as Ziggy Stardust, his most memorable creation, was born as a mixture of Bowie's fascination with both science fiction and America. The protagonist of his 1972 music album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars,* Ziggy Stardust is a both a prophet and a savior, as he lives through the last five years Earth has left.

Ziggy Stardust was often compared to Michael Valentine Smith, Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* protagonist, as the two characters seem to share uncanny features, in particular regarding the utmost loneliness they experience, their messianic fate, or the impossibility to be properly understood by the others. Although Tony DeFries, Bowie's manager at the time, spread rumors regarding the two texts and the possibility of Bowie's playing Valentine's part in a future movie adaptation, the singer denied getting any inspiration from Heinlein's novel altogether. Moreover, he claims in a 1974 interview with William Burroughs, for *The Rolling Stones* magazine, that he does not even like the book: "No, I don't like the book much. In fact, I think it is terrible. It was suggested to me that I make it into a movie, then I got around to reading it. It seemed a bit too Flower-Powery and that made me a bit wary" (Bowie, *Rolling Stones* 1974).

In the same interview, the two discuss their disappointment with the science fiction movie, as William Burroughs argues that "science fiction has not been very successful. It was supposed to start a whole new trend and nothing happened. For the special effects in some of the movies, like *2001*, it was great. But it all ended there" (Burroughs, *Rolling Stones* 1974), and Bowie agrees with him, saying: "I feel the same way … I don't believe in proper cinema; it doesn't have the strength of television. People having to go out to the cinema is really archaic. I'd much rather sit at home" (Bowie, *Rolling Stones* 1974). Regardless of their apparent disappointment with the efficacy of the science fiction movie to have a real impact on society, the same year David Bowie starred as a protagonist in a science fiction movie: not in the movie adaptation of Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, but in an adaptation of Walter Tevis' novel, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

The Man Who Fell to Earth, turned into a movie by director Nicolas Roeg and scriptwriter Paul Mayersberg, tells the story of Thomas Jerome Newton, an Anthean alien who comes to Earth in order to save his home planet. Although it is unclear whether Bowie read the novel before writing *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, as there are no interviews to certify this, and none of his biographers mention it, Ziggy Stardust and Thomas Jerome Newton have a lot in common. Both protagonists try to save Earth from self-destruction and, in doing so, they alienate themselves from the others. Moreover, they become symbols of hybrid identities, subverting the stereotypical white male identity.

3.1 Ziggy Stardust as an Embodiment for the Marginal Identity

Ziggy Stardust was created by David Bowie for his 1972 album, entitled *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. As Bowie claimed in later interviews, the idea for this character, which was innovative at the time, came as a consequence of his inability to perceive himself as a rock star and, thus, write for himself. As he claims in a 1987 Joe Smith *Off the Record* interview, Ziggy was a necessary tool for him to unleash his creativity:

> Writing a song for me never rang true. I had no problems writing something for Iggy Pop, or working with Lou Reed, or writing for Mott the Hopple. I can get into their mood and what they want to do. But I find it extremely hard to write for me. So, I found it quite easy to write for the artists that I would create. So, I did find it much easier, having created the Ziggy, to then write for him. Even if it was me doing it (*laughs*)! I was able to distance myself from the whole [situation]… (Bowie, *Off the Record* 1987).

Furthermore, in the same interview he argues that he did not feel comfortable with his newly achieved status, following the success of *Space Oddity* and the moderate success of *The Man Who Sold the World* and *Hunky Dory*. Hence, he says that even at the height of his fame, he has not felt like a rock star: "There's a feeling of inadequacy in that manner. I never really felt like a rock singer, a rock star, or whatever. And I was a little out of my element" (Bowie, *Off the Record* 1987).

In that sense, it can be argued that Ziggy's creation represented the embodiment of a need to accept a new type of identity. Ziggy Stardust, thus, became an emblem for a type of identity which was not yet accepted, one that was outrageous and outspoken. David Bowie projected his own feelings of inadequacy onto Ziggy, creating a symbol for all those who felt marginalized to relate to. Covered in make-up, and wearing bold dresses on stage, Ziggy Stardust became a foil for all the people who felt like they do not fit in. As David Buckley points out,

> for every teenager who considered him or herself unfinished, who as not quite happy with his or her lot, who didn't like the way society worked but couldn't articulate that sense of disquiet, … for those unsure about their sexuality or who were in agonies about 'coming out' (Buckley 6),

Ziggy Stardust was there to offer comfort.

Through Ziggy Stardust, David Bowie managed to subvert expectations regarding normalcy. Hence, Ziggy was not an alien because he came from outer space, but because he represented everything that was alien on Earth: androgynous, bisexual, and hedonistic. The alien is the perfect embodiment for this sort of identities, as Adam Roberts underlines that the apparent gimmicks and clichés of popular science fiction are, in fact, means to "provide a symbolic grammar for articulating the perspectives of normally marginalized discourses of race, gender, of nonconformism and alternative ideologies" (27).

Most of the songs on *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* reinforce the idea of Ziggy Stardust as a savior for the outsiders. Songs such as *Rock'n'Roll Suicide* perfectly illustrate this side of Ziggy, as he sings:

> Oh no, love! You're not alone
> You're watching yourself but you're too unfair
> You got your head all tangled up
> But if I could only make you care
> Oh no, love! You're not alone
> No matter what or who you've been
> No matter when or where you've seen
> All the knives seem to lacerate your brain
> I've had my share, I'll help you with the pain
> You're not alone!
> Just turn on with me and you're not alone
> Let's turn on and be not alone (wonderful)
> Gimme your hands 'cause you're wonderful (David Bowie *Rock'n'Roll Suicide*).

In *Lady Stardust* he addresses the same themes of inadequacy:

> People stared at the makeup on his face
> Laughed at his long black hair, his animal grace
> The boy in the bright blue jeans
> Jumped up on the stage

Lady Stardust sang his songs
Of darkness and disgrace (David Bowie, *Lady Stardust*).

By consequence, the marginal is no longer presented as an outsider, but s/he is empowered by becoming a rock star and fascinating mass audiences.

It is important to note that the album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* does not openly share Ziggy's story. The album is a collection of songs which are meant to be sung by Ziggy Stardust, as he witnesses the slow approach of the end of the world. Bowie explains Ziggy's backstory to William Burroughs in a 1974 interview, revealing that "Ziggy is in a position where all the kids have access to things that they thought they wanted. The older people have lost all touch with reality and the kids are left on their own to plunder anything. Ziggy was in a rock & roll band and the kids no longer want rock & roll" (Bowie, *Rolling Stone* 1974). Therefore, Ziggy appears in order to take people out of their apathy, which is the natural consequence of learning the news that the Earth only has five years left until its demise.

The sense of lethargy which took over the world is presented in the opening track of the album, *Five Years*, as Ziggy sings:

News had just come over
We had five years left to cry in
News guy wept and told us
Earth was really dying (David Bowie, *Five Years*).

In an effort to save Earth's memory, Ziggy tries to cram everything and everyone in his head. However, as opposed to the main Culture, or mass media, which tended to overlook marginal identities, Ziggy makes sure to fit everybody in his discourse:

And all the fat, skinny people
And all the tall, short people
And all the nobody people
And all the somebody people (David Bowie, *Five Years*).

Hence, Ziggy does not attempt to save only the "somebody people", but places extra emphasis on "all the nobody people", who were time and time again forgotten by History. Moreover, he addresses the listener directly, as he sings:

> I think I saw you in an ice-cream parlour
> Drinking milkshakes cold and long
> Smiling and waving and looking so fine
> Don't think you knew you were in this song
> …….
> Your face, your race
> The way that you talk
> I kiss you, you're beautiful
> I want you to walk (David Bowie, *Five Years*)

The direct address to the listener shows once again Ziggy's willingness to focus on the outcast and on the outsider, on the person who has never been in a song before, or in the public eye before, because he or she has been repeatedly marginalized. Moreover, the outsider is seen as beautiful by the narrator, who tenderly watches from a distance the depicted scene. The line "Don't think you knew you were in this song" once again emphasizes the empowering nature of the song.

Throughout the album, Ziggy assumes the role of a prophet. Arguably, the button-eyes prophet *Blackstar* is just another reincarnation of Ziggy Stardust, who was the first pop star prophet in Bowie's career. Influenced by William Burroughs' *Nova Express*, Bowie explains in the same 1974 interview with the writer the science fiction story on which the album is set. Hence, he says that Ziggy was told by some vague entities named "infinites" to write a song about the coming of a savior that would save humankind from destruction. He does so, and that particular song is *Starman*, "which is the first news of hope that the people have heard" (Bowie, *Rolling Stone* 1974).

In the lyrics for *Starman*, Bowie makes it clear that the savior he is talking about is an all-inclusive pop star, who uses mass media in order to give a voice to those who have never had one throughout History:

> Switch on the TV, we may pick him up on channel two
> Look out your window, I can see his light

If we can sparkle he may land tonight
Don't tell your poppa or he'll get us locked up in fright (David Bowie, *Starman*).

However, the lyrics seem to hint at the fact that the world is not yet prepared for the coming of this Starman. For the world to be ready, the "children" need to gather the courage to "sparkle", or to detach themselves from the traditional patriarchal society. Moreover, they still need to be careful not to upset the patriarch, as Ziggy sings: "Don't tell your poppa or he'll get us locked up in fright" (David Bowie *Starman*).

In the end, mesmerized by his visions, Ziggy proclaims himself a prophet. With fame taking over him, Ziggy becomes the ultimate pop idol on earth:

With God-given ass
He took it all too far
But boy, could he play guitar
……
Making love with his ego
Ziggy sucked up into his mind
Like a leper messiah (David Bowie *Ziggy Stardust*).

According to Bowie, Ziggy's journey ends in *Rock'n'Roll Suicide*, where the "amazing infinites" come onto the stage and take pieces of Ziggy in order to make themselves real (since they are anti-matter and cannot physically exist on our planet) (Bowie, *Rolling Stone* 1974). As Ziggy dies, the infinites are born, and we are unsure whether they are going to save the Earth or not.

Overall, Ziggy Stardust illustrates the way in which science fiction tropes can be used to empower marginal identities. As Dick Hebdige argued in relation to Bowie and the subculture he generated, through Ziggy Stardust, Bowie managed to challenge "the traditional working-class puritanism" (88) and stereotypes regarding gender, sexual orientation, masculinity, or youth cultures in general. As such, Ziggy Stardust became an emblem for the marginal identity.

3.2 The Man Who Fell to Earth and the Fragmented Postmodern Identity

There are many similarities between Ziggy Stardust and Thomas Jerome Newton, the protagonist of Walter Tevis' novel *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1967), and this is probably the reason why Nicolas Roeg insisted that David Bowie play the main part in the movie adaptation, which he directed and was released in 1976. By that time, Bowie had already become a symbol of weirdness, and Ziggy Stardust was one the most famous fictional aliens to have visited Earth. Moreover, Gerard Loughlin argues that David Bowie "spent his first forty years on the planet acting like a man from the Andromeda galaxy" (239): queer, androgynous, and unaware of his surroundings due to the heavy drug. In the 2017 documentary, *David Bowie Is The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Nicolas Roeg reveals that he did not direct Bowie too much on the set, and rather let him act out his strangeness.

Like Ziggy Stardust, Thomas Jerome Newton is another representation of a marginal identity in popular culture. Hence, the present section will focus on the way in which the alien becomes a vessel for embodying the fragmented, hybrid Postmodern identity, while also subverting the traditional, stable, white male identity. In addition to Walter Tevis' novel and Nicolas Roeg's adaptation of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, we will also focus on the musical *Lazarus*, which represents a continuation of Newton's story, written by Enda Walsh and David Bowie, and performed for the first time in December 2015.

Ellen Pedersen lists three main types of aliens: realistic, idealistic, and "an image of our own isolation and the limits of human knowledge" (quoted in Greenland 154). The realistic aliens, according to her, exist out there, they do not necessarily make contact with or care about us as humans, and they are mostly preoccupied with their own lives. Idealistic aliens do make contact, and their existence leads to an "us versus them" scenario, in which humans must protect their families or their own lives from the alien invasion. Movies frequently portray aliens in such ways, as Pedersen notes (paraphrased in Greenland 154), and this can be noticed even in the most recent popular movies, such as *The Avengers*, where aliens fit the dichotomy good/ evil, and must be defeated in order for the Earth to survive.

The last category in Pedersen's enumeration captures the Postmodernist way of imagining an alien, as a symbol of our own isolation and inadequacy. This interpretation is valid for Ziggy Stardust, as well as in J. G. Ballard's, Kurt Vonnegut's, Ray Bradbury's texts, or even in Thomas

Jerome Newton's story. Such an understanding of the alien follows Darko Suvin's belief that outer space is used in science fiction in order to depict inner space and, thus, it is extremely efficient in dealing with the alterity. On that account, as we have seen above, the astronaut and the alien seem to serve the same purpose in Bowie's repertoire.

Although there are some differences between the Thomas Jerome Newton from the novel and the one from the movie, the two characters share the same essential features: they have a humanoid construction, seem to be rather frail, and share a somewhat innocent point of view on humanity. Newton is, essentially, a good character, a failed hero who cannot save anything or anybody. Possessing little knowledge about the capitalist system on Earth, Newton hires Oliver as a lawyer, and, using alien science, starts patenting various inventions which will eventually make him both rich and a target for his competitors. In the end, due to his blind belief in human goodness, Newton ends up in the hands of the government which tortures him by doing various experiments on him in order to discover whether he is a fraud or not. In the book, Newton gets betrayed by his driver, whom he trusted, and who was actually an undercover FBI agent, and planted microphones in his house, while in the movie Newton is betrayed by his best, and arguably only, friend, dr. Bryce. Both the movie and the novel end with Newton alone, addicted to alcohol, and blind (metaphorically in the movie, and actually blind in the novel).

Hence, in Pederson's terms, Newton initially fits the idealistic alien category. He comes on Earth in order to both save his home planet, which is dying of thirst, and guide Earth's technological advancements towards a peaceful path, trying to avoid the wars that destroyed Anthea. Although Newton never intends to do any harm to humans, the story inevitably turns into an *us versus them* scenario. Failing to keep his true identity a secret, Newton is taken away by the government for further investigations, in order to be *figured out*. He is only released after his alienness is taken away and his idealism destroyed.

It is important to note that Newton is, throughout the entire story, utterly alone. Even though he meets people who try to help him in his journey, such as Betty Jo in the novel, renamed Mary Lou in the movie, or Nathan Bryce, Newton remains ultimately isolated most of the time, and unable to properly explain himself to the others. He is incapable of being the lover Mary Lou/Betty Jo desires, the ruthless businessman able to achieve his goals, the friend Nathan Bryce needs, or even the alien the government expects to discover. Accordingly, Newton shares the sense

of "inadequacy" that Bowie referred to in the previously mentioned interview regarding his career, as he repeatedly refuses to fit into any of the categories intended for him.

One of Newton's constant characteristics, reinforced in both the novel and the movie, is his kindness and tolerance. He does not get angry when his friends betray him, not even when the government kidnaps him. On that account, he fits into the category of what Benford and Huntington call "the friendly alien" (60): an empathic type who can innately understand the flawed human nature and does not seek revenge for what has been done to him. However, it is important to note that Newton's friendliness is also a paradox, as the two authors emphasize that "the imagined friendly alien achieves its benignity by approaching the familiar and conventionally valued, that is, by not being truly alien" (Huntington 60). Furthermore, by calling aliens friendly, we rob them of their true identity, "domesticat[ing] the strange" (Benford 23). In other words, when we imagine Newton as friendly, we simply try to explain the unexplainable to ourselves: it is friendly that which is obedient, compliant, and easily controllable.

The reference to friendliness is another feature which reinforces Newton's identity as a prosecuted hero, or a failed Christ-like figure. Akin to Jesus, Newton is sent to Earth to save it, but the common people refuse his help. In the novel, the similarity between Jesus and Newton is directly pointed out in the narration on more than one occasion. For example, the moment when Newton notices the religious painting in Oliver Farnsworth's office where, hanging on the wall, it is described as follows:

> a large painting of a religious figure whom Newton recognized as Jesus, nailed to a wooden cross. The face in the picture startled him for a moment – with its thinness and large piercing eyes it could have been the face of an Anthean (Tevis 15).

Moreover, similar references are made during one of Bryce's and Newton's discussions, when Newton correlates his purpose on Earth with Christ's mission:

> 'And what's going to stop it then? Human virtue? The Second Coming?'…
> For the first time Newton laughed, softly and pleasantly. 'Maybe it will be the Second Coming indeed. Maybe it will be Jesus Christ himself. In ten years.'
> 'If he comes,' Bryce said, 'he'd better watch his step.'
> 'I imagine he'll remember what happened to him the last time,' Newton said. (Tevis 85)

Hence, Newton hints that his coming is, in fact, Jesus' second coming, meant to save humanity from self-destruction.

In the movie, this parallelism is suggested via Pieta-like scenes, in which Mary Lou carries Newton's weak body from the elevator to his room, as visible in figure 2:



Figure 2. Still from Roeg, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*

Moreover, the fact that Betty Jo's name from the novel is changed into Mary Lou is yet another Biblical reference, thus time to Mary Magdalene. Like the Biblical Mary of Magdala, the female protagonist of the movie seems consumed by hedonistic pleasures, such as sex, alcohol, or drugs. She is a fallen woman, clinging to Newton for salvation. However, instead of offering her redemption, Newton lets himself corrupted by her, and by the end of the novel he has lost his purpose and turned into an erratic and lonely alcoholic.

The Biblical trio is completed by dr. Nathan Bryce in the movie, who plays the part of Judas. He betrays Newton, as he hands him over to the authorities. Consequently, opposed to what Newton argues in the novel, that if Jesus comes again he will "remember what happened to him the last time" (Tevis 85), in the movie, Newton seems to repeat the same steps, and he is betrayed by those he trusts most. Similarly to the way in which Jesus is prompted to deny that He is the Son of God, Newton is compelled to give up his alien nature: he is tortured, beaten, and questioned over and over again. According to Gerard Loughlin, human suffering is the most important

connection between Jesus and Newton, as he claims that, through their stories, we face "the indifference of the world to the 'disaster, to the miracle and the martyr, to the important failure'" (238).

Newton, like Jesus, is left alone, and he experiences the loneliness of one who knows too much, but cannot share it with anybody. In the movie, Newton's decision to reveal his real alien self to Mary Lou, whom he trusted and loved, leads to a second betrayal, as Mary Lou runs away shocked, and refuses to believe her eyes. Gerard Loughlin notes that

> when Mary Lou screams at the sight of Newton in his alien form, it is the scream of any terrified girl in countless horror films; the scream of the girl who has desired to see, or to see too much. But it is also the terror of one who has seen the face of God, since no one can see God's face and live (Loughlin 248).

This idea is reinforced by Benford's observation about alien encounters that "the truly alien doesn't just disturb and educate, it breaks down reality, often fatally, for us" (Benford 31). While, in the novel, Mary Lou is able to resume her life normally after Newton is taken prisoner (since she never found out about Newton's true nature), in the movie the encounter leaves her paralyzed, unable to return to her daily chores. Although it seems she has rebuilt her life with dr. Bryce, her addiction to alcohol reveals her unstable mental state.

Hence, Newton is utterly alone because he is utterly alien and cannot be understood by those around him. He constantly must hide himself and his real identity in order to fit in. Although Antheans appear to be androgynous beings, on Earth Newton assumes the identity of a white male, which he simultaneously subverts. He is described in the novel as follows:

> He was not a man; yet he was very much like a man. He was six and a half feet tall, and some men are even taller than that; his hair was as white as that of an albino, yet his face was a light tan colour; and his eyes a pale blue. His frame was probably slight, his features delicate, his fingers long, thin, and the skin almost translucent, hairless. There was an elfin quality to his face, a fine boyish look to the wide, intelligent eyes, and the white, curly hair now grew quite over his ears. He seemed quite young. … He was human; but not, properly, a *man*. (Tevis 6-7)

As the narrator emphasizes, although he does look human, Newton does not comply to the Earthly regulation of manhood of the time. Like Ziggy Stardust, Newton displays effeminate features, such as the completely hairless body, longer hair, and his delicate and elegant body movements. In the movie, as David Bowie plays Newton's part, Roeg made the decision to keep his bright orange hair, arguing that it adds to the strangeness of the character.

However, the greatest assault on traditional masculinity seems to be the way in which the Anthean body is constructed. Although sex plays a big part in the movie adaptation, this issue is barely mentioned in the novel, where Newton decides to remain faithful to his Anthean family. Gerard Loughlin notes that the movie "*The Man Who Fell to Earth* offers two paradigms of sexual union, the one phallic and violent, the other asexual and pacific" (248). The asexual Anthean intercourse is depicted in Newton's memories of home, at it is similar to aerial ballet, with both partners secreting a sticky substance during intercourse. It is important to mention in this context that the Jerome Newton from the movie has an asexual body, and he uses a fake penis to mimic the male body. Hence, it is uncertain how Anthean reproduction works: it may be similar to Ursula K Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness,* where the aliens from Winter develop their sexual organs only when they enter kemmer.

While Newton's union with his Anthean partner is presented as idyllic and peaceful, Newton's relationship with Mary Lou is filled with violence and hastiness. Sex seems to be, like alcohol, drugs or religion, just another distraction for Newton, who tries to come to terms with the fact that his plan to save Anthea is not going to work out. Moreover, sex does not bring closure between Mary Lou and Newton, and their relation seems to be built exclusively on superficial pleasure. This is furthermore emphasized by the fact that Mary Lou cannot handle the truth about Newton's identity, and, thus, she cannot accept him as he is.

At this point, it is interesting to note that Newton's and Mary Lou's relationship is not the only one which transgresses norms in the movie. As Gerard Loughlin notes, all the romantic relations presented in the movie violate traditional norms regarding age, sex, skin color, or race – "incest, homosexuality, miscegenation, bestiality" (Loughlin 245). In addition to a human being in love with an alien, we also see an interracial marriage (scandalous, given the historical context) between Peters and his wife, dr. Bryce's immoral interest in his younger students, whom he seduces and then consummates their relationship in cars or cheap hotel rooms, and also

homosexuality, represented by Newton's lawyer, Oliver, who is in a relationship with another man. Hence, the movie subverts traditional expectations regarding romantic relationships.

The reasons behind Newton's inadequacy are not only a consequence of his alien nature, but also of his education. As it is emphasized both in the novel and in the movie, Newton learnt all about humans from television. Prior to leaving Anthea, we are told that Newton had undergone thousands of hours of tests and simulations, which were meant to teach him how to act and speak like a human. Despite his diligent practice, everybody whom he interacts with gets the sense that something is out of place. Therefore, Newton decides to seclude himself in his house, and limit his interactions with outsiders. The clumsy and awkward interactions are ultimately attributed to an inadequacy related to the fact that he is an extravagant billionaire, rather than an alien.

Accordingly, in Baudrillard's terms, Newton's life represents the ultimate simulacrum. Both the movie and the novel are filled with references to images and screens, and his entire knowledge is based on them. Gerard Loughlin notices that the movie "is replete with shots of people looking in mirrors and at reflections, and through windows and lenses, whether worn as eye glasses or used in laboratories. Sight is always mediated; knowledge always imagined. Everything is as it appears" (Loughlin 235). Hence, Newton's entire reality is based on surface, a surface which ultimately becomes reality for him. Nonetheless, his fascination with the TV does not stop with his arrival on Earth as, even, though he is surrounded by real people, he prefers to observe those on television programs. As the novel and the movie progress, Newton interacts less and less with people, and watches TV increasingly (as seen in figure 4). However, his fascination with surfaces and mediated knowledge is not only visible via the television screen, or as Loughlin argued, glasses, mirrors, or windows (35). It can also be argued that all of Newton's patents are related to vision in one way or another: the technicolor movie, the x-ray, or the perfect quality camera.

Similarly to how he needs to keep appearances in order to be accepted and to fit in, he soon discovers that everything on TV is a deception as well. As Newton was trying to sell the idea of an extravagant billionaire American in order to hide his true identity, while browsing through the channels, he notices that the TV was selling another illusion about America:

> There were pictures of white New England churches, field hands – always one smiling Negro in each group – and maple trees. These films seemed more and more common lately; and, like so many popular magazines, more and more wildly chauvinistic – more

> committed than ever to the fantastic lie that American was a nation of God-fearing small towns, efficient cities, healthy farmers, kindly doctors, bemused housewives, philanthropic millionaires.
>
> 'My God,' he said aloud. 'My God, you frightened, self-pitying hedonists! Liars! Chauvinists! Fools!' (Tevis 96).

Ergo, Newton is scandalized by his discovery that the real people he met on Earth are nothing compared to those presented on TV.

Moreover, in the movie we often see Newton browsing through the channels in order to avoid conversation with other characters, such as Mary Lou or dr. Bryce. While watching TV, Newton often seems absorbed, and unable to notice what is happening around him. In order to emphasize Newton's obsession with the medium, he is often depicted as watching a large number of television sets at the same time, as visible in figure 3:



Figure 3. Still from Roeg, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*

Asked about his fascination for television, Newton makes the following remark: "Television. The strange thing about television is that it doesn't tell you everything. It shows you everything about life on Earth, but the true mysteries remain. Perhaps it's in the nature of television. Just waves in space" (*The Man Who Fell to Earth* 01:10:36- 01:10:56). Hence, Newton emphasizes the

ephemeral and trivial nature of television, that cannot reach the root of an issue, but offers an oversimplified version of anything. His obsession with television may also show a yearning for simplicity, clarity, and comfort.

Seeing himself a failure, he uses the television, combined with drugs and alcohol, in order to exchange his reality for the lie that the mass media reinforces. Although he is aware that he is living a lie, he prefers the beautiful lie to the harsh truth about the American dream and about American hospitality: the truth that America is not as welcoming to him and to the other outsiders, as the poem engraved at the bottom of the Statue of Liberty seems to argue. This theme is going to be furthermore reinforced in the musical *Lazarus*, which will be the main focus of the following paragraphs.

The Man Who Fell to Earth ends where *Lazarus* begins. We encounter Newton years later, alone and drunk, watching television in his room. At the end of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Newton ultimately manages to escape the government, after having been its prisoner for years and after countless experiments performed on him. Blinded by the X-ray (in the novel) and blinded metaphorically by having his human contact lenses glued permanently to his eyes (in the movie), Newton succumbs to addiction. He no longer has his eyes, and he is doomed to an everlasting blindness: unaware of himself and unaware of his surroundings. He is hopeless, incomprehensible to anyone, far from anybody or anyone familiar, and blaming himself for having failed to save his own people. Newton's tragedy is that he has become too human to be considered alien and too human to remain an alien. He seems to have lost himself forever, and there is no possibility to restore himself.

3.3 *Lazarus* and the Failure of the American Dream as Seen through the Eyes of an Alien

In *Lazarus*, Newton is on the verge of insanity. He has nothing left to live for, but it seems that he cannot die either. Enda Walsh reveals in the *Introduction* that he and Bowie discussed while writing the play about "a person dying and the moment before death and what might happen in their mind and how that would be constructed onstage. We started talking about escape, but we ended up talking about a person trying to find rest. About dying in an easier way" (Walsh ix). Hence, in addition to the biographical dimension of the play, as David Bowie was dying of cancer in real life, what started as simple science fiction, turned into a philosophical inquiry about death and trying to find peace. The musical has even less science fiction elements than the novel or the movie, and Newton's alienness is perceived as insanity by the other characters. Moreover, the readers are also left to wonder whether Newton is really alien or just completely insane.

Newton's relation with the television and with surfaces seems to have reached a whole new level in *Lazarus*. If, in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Newton is aware of the fact that the television is just a screen, presenting a mediated version of truth, the border between reality and TV seems to have collapsed in *Lazarus*. The television set, which has become a character in itself, is communicating directly with Newton. For example, in a conversation with Michael, Newton reveals that the television is sending him messages from home:

> I was sitting there in the middle of the night and the television went off and I saw something come out from the darkness. It's a scene I couldn't think about for years – and it came to me the way a lot of these things do – in these pictures. (*Slight pause.*) It was morning time and I was sitting at home with my wife and son and daughter – and nothing special happened – just small talk between us that I can't remember now – but I was there at home for a few moments with them. It was cruel in a way (Bowie, Walsh 5).

Hence, the discrepancy between reality and imagination has fallen apart. Besides, the fact that Newton uses the words "wife", "son", and "daughter" in relation to his Anthean family is also a manifestation of his inability to distinguish between his alien identity and his human one. Knowing that the Anthean civilization is fundamentally different from ours, in terms of reproduction as well as a society organization, it is clear that Newton misuses the concepts. In other words, he attributes human categories to alien concepts.

In addition to receiving messages from the television, or having visions with other characters, various characters pop out of the screen in order to communicate with him. Hence, Newton is able to see, through the television screen, Valentine's murders and Elly's and Zach's discussions at home, as well as to communicate with three Teenage Girls (Named TG1, TG2, and TG3). The girls often interrupt the narrative in order to sing a song or to join Newton's singing. Some of the songs they sing are directly related to Newton's inability to distinguish between reality and the Dream that the mass media reinforces, as illustrated in the lyrics of *This is Not America*:

(*Girl.*) Snowman melting
From the inside
Falcon spirals
To the ground
(*Teenage Girls.*) This could be the biggest sky
(*Girl.*) So bloody red
Tomorrow's clouds

A little piece of you
The little piece of me
Will die

(*Teenage Girls.*) This could be the miracle
(*Girl*) For this is not America (Bowie *This is Not America* in *Lazarus* 11)

This song methodically deconstructs idyllic images of American exceptionalism: the skies are not so vast and pure as the dream narrative describes them, they are rather "bloody red" and cloudy, the falcon "spirals to the ground" (probably shot), the snowman melts from the inside (a reference to Bowie's belief that the American Dream was "born out of decay" (Bowie, *NME* 1980)) or the blossoms that "fail to bloom" (Bowie *This is Not America* in *Lazarus* 11). Overall, America is not the "miracle" or the promised land in which an alien like Newton might find salvation.

Like Ziggy Stardust, all that Newton was able to enjoy in the individualist capitalist America were the fifteen minutes of fame. Both in Tevis' novel and in the movie adaptation, the mass media develops an obsession with Newton, who is presented in a romanticized fashion, as a mysterious extravagant billionaire. Hence, the same as Ziggy, Newton "becomes a ruined and

lonely reflection of the contemporary culture of decadence and self-destruction" (Thinwhiteduke.net). Furthermore, songs such as *Lazarus* or *The Man Who Sold the World* reinforce these ideas, providing comments on the celebrity lifestyle and on the masses' fascination with it.

In *Lazarus* (the song), Newton remembers his youth and his dreams, pointing out the superficiality of popular culture as he sings "Look up here, man, I'm in danger / I've got nothing left to lose" (Bowie *Lazarus* 6). Hence, he emphasizes the loneliness that popular culture can generate through Newton's condition: although he served as an object of fascination for thousands of people, he was alone and disconnected from reality

> I'm so high it makes my brain whirl
> I dropped my cellphone down below
> Ain't that just like me
> By the time I got to New York
> I was living like a king
> Then I used up all my money (David Bowie *Lazarus* in *Lazarus* 6).

Moreover, in *The Man Who Sold the World*, the loss of an identity is emphasized in lyrics such as:

> And made my way back home
> I searched for form and land
> For years and years I roamed
> I gazed a gazely stare
> At all the millions here
> We must have died alone
> A long long time ago (Bowie *The Man Who Sold the World* in *Lazarus* 14).

Like Major Tom, Thomas Jerome Newton's story is ultimately a story about finding one's home, or a place where you are accepted and free to be whoever you want to be. However, while *Space Oddity* left Major Tom stranded in space, and then his memory turned into an icon, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* leaves Newton lost on Earth.

Lazarus brings the conclusion to the alien's odyssey, by bringing him peace. With the help of Marley, one of the girls who come out of the TV, Newton finally builds the spaceship that he

failed to finish in the original story. Although it is not a real spaceship, but a mere drawing on the floor, Newton's condition makes him unable to distinguish it from reality. The final trip towards the stars, however, in reality coincides with his death. As he slowly pushes the knife into his stomach (in his imagination, killing Marley), he delivers his final monologue:

> And I'm not of this world. And not yet market by this place here. Not pinned down in this apartment- not divided into days and praying for my death – and bullied by this broken mind – and before all of this happened to me – and before the journey down here – to wake in the place I was born … And pushed further into my madness – and trying to turn these old words into something new. (*Slight pause.*) I'm done with this life – so a new universe I'll dream big up there. And although always stuck inside this breaking mind – I've stepped off this Earth into that better place. An imagined world. (*Slight pause.*) My new family (Bowie, Walsh 61).

Overall, Newton's final lines deliver a commentary on the fragmented and marginal identity that cannot find peace in this world. However, the musical ends on a positive note, as Newton asks Marley: "Do you think we can get lost in these stars?" (Bowie, Walsh 61), and the notes for *Heroes* begin, waiting for Newton to deliver his final song.

On the final page of the musical lies written Emma Lazarus' poem, *The New Colossus*, which represents the conclusion to Newton's story. Hence, by using science fiction tropes, David Bowie and Enda Walsh deconstruct the myth of the American Dream: America, the land of the free, where everybody is welcome. This certainly did not happen in the case of Newton, the most alien(ated) of immigrants, who did not find in America the salvation it promised to be. He did not manage to save Anthea, he did not manage to save Earth, and, moreover, he did not manage to save himself. The poem, read through the perspective of Newton, ridicules the American society which does not raise up to Emma Lazarus' message, and has left Newton, like many other immigrants, disillusioned and alone.

4. *1. Outside*: Cyberpunk, Detectives, and Metafiction

The final section of this chapter will focus on David Bowie's album, *1.Outside*, released in 1995. Although the album is very vast, encompassing a multitude of themes and texts (in addition to the twenty songs, there are around two extra hours of unreleased recordings, leaked under the name of the *Leon Recordings*, a short story written by David Bowie in the album inlay, three musical videos, photoshoots, and paintings), this analysis is going to focus on cyberpunk and the way in which Bowie's album uses science fiction tropes in order to comment on the status of contemporary popular culture, reflected into the apocalyptical environment of Outside.

Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction which develops in Postmodernism, as a reaction to the explosion of information which characterizes the last decades of the 20th century. Hence, the two words which make up the name of the genre also offer its most elementary definition. The word "cyber" refers to the science of cybernetics, which developed shortly after the Second World War, but became largely available starting with the 1980s, and especially 1990s. Norbert Wiener, who is considered the founder of cybernetics, defined it as "the scientific study of control and communication in the animal and the machine" in the title of his book (Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*), or the science which has is primarily interested in self-regulatory machines. Therefore, this genre is interested in the way in which self-regulatory systems, such as the computers, the internet, or the "interchangeability of human bodies and machines" (Cavallaro 12) have developed in Postmodernism. Clearly, the second part of its name, "punk", refers to its subversive demeanor, as Dani Cavallaro points out that "Cyberpunk's characters are people on the fringe of society: outsiders, misfits and psychopaths, struggling for survival on a garbage-strewn planet" (Cavallaro 14).

The term "cyberpunk" was coined by Bruce Bethke in order to describe "novels and stories about the information explosion of the 1980s (hence 'Cyber', from cybernetics), most of them picturing a dense, urban, confusing new world, in which most of us will find that we have been disenfranchised from any real power (hence 'punk')" (Clute 67). Although the first cyberpunk novel is considered to be William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, released in 1984, this genre drew inspiration from New-Wave authors such as J.G. Ballard or Brian Aldiss. In their works, there can be traced an acute interest in the future, in particular the near-future, as they focus on issues such as the "environmental depletion, urban overcrowding and the relationship between technology,

crime, drug addiction and sexuality" (Cavallaro 5). Consequently, Cyberpunk continues New Wave's concern with the impact of technological development on the society.

Hence, embracing a Postmodern genre par excellence, the cyberpunk writers were also, as Dani Cavallaro underlines, the first "writers and artists [who] have actually witnessed the birth and growth of technologies that earlier generations of science-fiction authors could only fantasize or speculate about." (Cavallaro 19). As Larry McCaffery notes, the cyberpunk writers

> were the first generation of artists for whom the technologies of satellite dishes, video and audio players and recorders, computers and video games (both of particular importance), digital watches, and MTV were not exoticisms, but part of a daily 'reality matrix'. They were also the first generation of writers who were reading Thomas Pynchon, Ballard, and Burroughs as teenagers, who had grown up immersed in technology but also in pop culture, in the values and aesthetics of the counterculture associated with drug culture, punk rock, video games, Heavy Metal comic books, and the gore-and-spatter SF/horror films of George Romero, David Cronenberg, and Ridley Scott (McCaffery quoted in Cavallaro 18-19).

Accordingly, what is considered fiction by early science fiction writers, is reality for the Postmodern writers. There have been drastic changes in the way in which information spreads, and Baudrillard's fears regarding the future of the hyperreal and simulacra are now part of day-to-day life. As such, science fiction has developed as a genre too, in order to better illustrate the contemporary world.

In addition to science fiction, cyberpunk writers got inspired by early 20th century gothic fiction and hard-boiled detective fiction . While we will focus more prominently on the gothic in the next chapter, it is important to highlight Fred Bottling's comment regarding the status of the gothic genre in Postmodernism. He says that contemporary gothic texts are usually

> Located in a thoroughly secular world, [where] science signifies the oppressive domination of technological production, bureaucratic organisation and social regulation. What is lost and recovered in the confrontation with scientifically-inspired machines, mutants and inhuman, automated worlds is a virtually religious sense of human wholeness and agency (Bottling, *Gothic* 102).

Thus, the concern with mechanization and self-regulatory systems is present in the gothic too, not just in science fiction. The blending of the three genres can be observed in David Bowie's *1.Outside* album, where the gothic, cyberpunk, and hard-boiled detective fiction, with the addition of metatextuality, collude in order to emphasize the sense of confusion and paranoia which characterizes the end of the millennium.

Released in 1995, in collaboration with Brian Eno, with whom Bowie also worked in the 1970s, for his Berlin trilogy, *1.Outside* was supposed to be the first in a series of three albums meant to depict the last few years of the millennium (which explains the album's title). However, Bowie and Eno gave up on the project, and *1.Outside* is the only album out of the trilogy that came out, to which we can add the unreleased *Leon Recordings*. It is interesting to note that these leaked recordings were, in fact, the original album that was rejected by the record label company, which complained that it was too experimental and incomprehensible to any listener. In order to be able to release it, David Bowie needed to change a lot of aspects, including recording new songs meant to make the album more listenable to, but which were unrelated to the general theme of the album.

Thus, in this analysis, we will not focus on the later additions, meant to ease the listening, and songs such as *Halo Spaceboy* (already discussed earlier), *Get Real*, and *Strangers When We Meet* will be omitted. However, we will take into account the *Leon Recordings*, which were leaked onto the Internet by an unknown user in 2002. At this point, it is important to underline that by being an unofficial release, the *Leon Recordings* do not have official lyrics published anywhere, thus the source of all the quotations will be my own transcripts.

1.Outside is a collection of songs, texts, and digital photography meant to illustrate the paranoid atmosphere which takes over the world as year 2000 is approaching. *The Diary of Nathan Adler*, subtitled *the art-ritual murder of baby grace blue. A non-linear Gothic Drama Hyper-circle*, the short story which accompanies the album, narrated by detective Nathan Adler, shows the "increasingly dehumanized environments, machinic doubles and violent, psychotic fragmentation", which Fred Bottling argues are defining traits of both contemporary gothic and cyberpunk (Bottling 102). The short story takes the form of a diary, in which Nathan Adler takes down his constant observations regarding Outside. However, as opposed to a traditional journal, detective Adler does not make notes of his thoughts in a chronological order, but he rather scribbles incomprehensible remarks about one character or another, mixing his own personal opinions with historical facts, random data received from computers, or cryptic memories.

However, Nathan Adler's status as a detective is rather misleading. He is not called to investigate a murder in order to discover clues which may point out to the murderer, but his purpose is to examine whether a certain murder is a piece of art or not. Hence, Nathan Adler is the critic in a world which emulates the art world. The other characters present in the album often act as replacements for traditional artistic actors: Ramona A. Stone plays the part of the curator, The Minotaur is the Artist, Baby Grace Blue's corpse is the piece of art, Algeria Touchshriek - the art collector, and Leon Blank is the confused consumer who falls prey to the villainous games of the art industry. The setting also references the art world, as at the center of the narrative is the Museum of Modern Parts, in front of which the Artist exhibited his creation, while detective Adler's office is located in SoHo neighborhood, an area famous for the large amount of galleries and artists' lofts. Moreover, Adler's agency, Art-Crime Inc, in charge of determining the artistic value of a crime, has its bureau in what used to be painter Mark Rothko's studio.

The hard-boiled aspect of the story is, thus, embodied by the basic detective plot: a murder was committed, and a detective is called upon to investigate. The rest of the story, as well as the songs and photographs, constitute the maze that the detective must navigate in order to come up with a solution. The story is, however, filled with metafictional references, as Bran Nicole argues that ultimately all detective stories are metafictional in some way, questioning "our engagement with literature itself" (183). The reader, like the detective, looks at the text and tries to find connections that might confer it meaning, thus solving its mystery.

The classical way of reading a text (or of solving a crime) is by doing what Mark Siegel calls "paranoid reading", an activity in which "the author relies on the reader to find correspondences between names, colours, or the physical attributes of characters and other invisible qualities of those characters, places, and actions" (Siegel 50). Classic detective fiction functions in a similar manner, operating through detectives which are "thinking machines" (Krutnik 33) and assume it as their duty to bring order back into the world. If, as Frank Krutnik argues, in traditional detective stories the detective is the "moral center" (39), William Park claims that in neo-noir detective fiction (which is analogous to the Postmodern detective story, and the two terms will be used interchangeably throughout this paper), its only "stable characteristic is its 'absent centeredness'" (115). This feature is illustrated in *1.Outside*, where the story seems to lack any center or consistent organization: Nathan Adler's notes, the songs, or the cassettes do not contribute in aiding the creation of a coherent storyline, but they are rather responsible for its

fragmentation. Moreover, the detective seems unable to organize the plot rationally or provide any explanations.

In light of this, Andrew Spicer describes a neo-noir detective as "weak, confused, unstable, and ineffectual" (47). Reading through *The Diary of Nathan Adler*, or listening to the songs which are interpreted by him on the album, we note that time after time he fails to bring resolution to any situation. Moreover, he constantly moans about losing himself to the chaos. In *Hearts Filthy Lesson* he declares "Oh Paddy, I think I've lost my way", while in *No Control* he frantically repeats:

> If I can't control my destiny
> No control
> I can't believe I've no control
> It's all deranged (David Bowie, *No Control*).

In the two segues which he narrates, and which serve as voice-overs in the neo-noir plot, Nathan Adler furthermore reinforces the feelings of inadequacy and inefficacy, as he appears to be daydreaming instead of rigorously attempting a logical solution. Hence, the two segues consist of fragments of Adler's memories, who does not bother to provide the listener with any context. In *Segue - Nathan Adler (I)* he narrates pieces of memories, which are often interrupted by remarks such as: "Oh wait, I'm getting ahead of myself", while the second segue depicts Nathan Adler in a pensive mood: "Ramona is so cold. When she broke it off with Leon, she said, 'The ring is enough, I don't wanna see his face again.' Ramona was so cold, Ramona was so cold..." (David Bowie, *Segue- Nathan Adler (II)*). Repeating the same sentence three times in a total of five sentences, demonstrates Adler's inaptness to get over his subjectivity and come up with a detached solution. Moreover, the thoughts of Ramona freeze the detective in a loop.

In *The Diary of Nathan Adler*, the reader is provided with more information regarding the detective's thought process. In section "Friday, December 31, 1999, 19.30 AM", at "11.00 AM", he reveals to the reader his plan for solving the mystery: "Best thing to do now is feed all relevant pieces into the Mack-Verbasiser, the Metarandom programme that re-strings real life facts as improbable virtual-fact. I may get a lead or two from that" (Bowie, *The Diary of Nathan Adler* np). Thus, the detective's chosen method for solving the mystery is to insert all the known data into a randomizer. The randomizer is the ultimate symbol for the meaningless plot, as it emphasizes

the lack of connection between any of the fragments. Undoubtedly, the results that Nathan Adler receives from the Mack-Verbasiser are nothing but a long string of irrelevant information:

> No convictions of assertive saints believed Caucasian way-out tyrannical evoked no images described Christian saints questions no female christian machine believed no work is caucasian assertive saints believed female described Christian tyrannical questions R.A. Stone convictions martyrs and tyrannicals are evoked Female described sado-masochist questions I am suicide described the fabric machine Slashing way out saints and martyrs and thrown downstairs (David Bowie, *The Diary of Nathan Adler*).

The random results, provided by the Metarandom programme, accentuate cyberpunk's interest in the communication between the human and the machine. As Fred Bottling argues, "the artificial forms that are given life and consciousness project current anxieties about disintegrating Western cultural and social formations" (Bottling 106). Accordingly, the long random string represents the embodiment of the fragmentation of the Postmodern society, more and more divided and chaotic as the year 2000 approaches.

In *Semiotics and Philosophy of Language,* Umberto Eco describes three types of mazes: the classical Greek maze, the mannerist maze, and the "net" (82). He claims that the net is the maze which characterizes Postmodernism and defines it as a structure wherein "every point can be connected with every point, and, where the connections are not yet designed, they are, however, conceivable and designable. A net is an unlimited territory" (Eco 81). In *1.Outside*, the maze is represented not only by the obstacles that the detective must face in order to solve the crime, but by the Internet (also known as the world wide *web*) as well. Moreover, the Artist's work, which generates the action in *1.Outside,* is the embodiment of a mazelike structure.

Suitably, Baby Grace Blue's body, exposed in front of the Museum of Modern Parts, is meant to resemble a web, as Nathan Adler notices in his *Diary*: "intestines removed, disentangled and reknitted as it were, into a small net or a web" (David Bowie, *The Diary of Nathan Adler*). The motif of the net reappears later on, in Baby Grace Blue's segue from the *Leon Recordings,* where she says: "I think we're struck in a web, a sort of nerve net, as it were a sort of nerve internet". The reappearance of the net under all these forms can also be understood as metafictional, since not only the fictional characters are trapped in the maze, but the reader as well.

The fictional work is held captive on the CD-ROM and soon enough (as envisioned in the album), people would be prisoners to the Internet as well.

Moreover, throughout the songs, the listener is constantly reminded of the material medium which reproduces the fictional work, the CD. David Bowie and Brian Eno discussed in an interview in 1995 about the era of the CD as a container of music coming to an end, and they admitted that in *1.Outside,* they tried to make music which sounded like "it couldn't fit on a CD" (Bowie, Eno, *Raygun Magazine*). In *The Enemy Is Fragile* suite from the *Leon Recordings*, an unnamed narrator (possibly Algeria Touchshriek or Nathan Adler) evaluates the album he is part of, as he says: "The editors have done an excellent job, the selections are generous, the notations are scrupulously scholarly. To believe that the quality of a CD-ROM can be conveyed through translation may seem presumptuous, but I believe the enterprise is greatly successful" (Bowie, *Leon Recordings*). Furthermore, the suite ends with the same narrator maniacally repeating "The editorial apparatus of this CD leaves nothing to be desired. Nothing. Nothing to be desired" (*Leon Recordings*). Hence, the abstract limits of the web have materialized in the fictional world, as the characters become aware of their status as prisoners within the aluminum layers of the audio CD-ROM, which has become their inescapable maze.

As mentioned above, cyberpunk is not usually interested in the distant future, but rather in the near future and the way in which technological advancement has impacted the society. The future, however, is treated with unrest, as John Clute observes that "Cyberpunk did not domesticate the future; it treated the future as a god" (67). *1.Outside* describes the society at the end of the millennium, more precisely, on the last day of the millennium, December 31, 1999, as it can be concluded from Nathan Adler's notes. Reigniting millennial fears, which trigger doomsday scenarios, the characters seem to have replaced traditional religion with a tribal manifestation of spirituality, in which the god they pray to is none other than technology itself. As Bowie claimed in one interview, towards the end of the 1990s the entire society displayed an "almost obsessive interest in ritualistic artists" (Bowie, *Vox Magazine* 1995), which he intended to mirror on the album, as he says:

> the album also has some sort of feeling of this new paganism that seems to be springing up with the advent of scarifications, piercings, tribalism, tattoos and whatever. It's like a replacement for a spiritual starvation that's going on. It's like a tribe with dim memories of what their rituals used to be (Bowie, *Vox Magazine* 1995).

The return to the tribal mentality and worship is embodied by the return of the Minotaur and of the high priestess, Ramona A. Stone.

Minotaur, also named The Artist in the album inlay, represents one of the gods that rise as a consequence of the neo-paganist advent on the album. However, as opposed to the previous gods, Minotaur is fragmented, broken, and confused. Comparable to how the Outside society is correlated to a "tribe with dim memories of what their rituals used to be" (Bowie, *Vox Magazine* 1995), Minotaur is a god with "dim memories" of what gods used to be. In the three songs that he sings on the album, we get the impression that he is unsure of himself, disoriented, as if he were mechanically following a ritual with an unknown destination. In other words, we see Minotaur's struggle to achieve spirituality, and these attempts leave him empty in the end. This attitude is evident in *I'm Deranged*, where he sings:

> I'd start to believe
> If I were to bleed
> Thin skies, the man chains his hands held high
> Cruise me blond
> Cruise me babe
> A blond belief beyond beyond beyond
> No return No return
> I'm deranged (David Bowie, *I'm Deranged*).

Thus, although the physical side of the ritual is there, as the man "chains his hands held high" in a prayer stance, the spiritual side seems to be lacking. The repetition of the adjective "blond" is also a wish to return to purity, probably a reference to angels, who are often depicted wearing golden flocks of hair. Overall, the song emphasizes Minotaur's lack of faith and his struggle to achieve the godlike status he is conferred by the narrative and, most evidently, by his own name.

The nihilistic atmosphere on the album is also represented through Ramona A. Stone, the high priestess of the Caucasian Suicide Temple, who is "vomiting out her doctrine of death-as-eternal-party into the empty vessels of Berlin youth" (David Bowie, *The Diary of Nathan Adler*). Hence, if Minotaur is the God, Ramona is the vessel. She also embodies cyberpunk's fascination with the dissolution of the border between genuine and artificial, between real and mechanical. As

Dani Cavallaro notes, the blurred distinction is emphasized in cyberpunk in the way in which the "so-called real humans interact with Artificial Intelligences, androids, cyborgs, computer-simulated bodies, mutants and replicants [who] are required to establish what exactly distinguishes the natural from the artificial" (Cavallaro 13).

This dissolution is illustrated in the *I Am with Name* segue, narrated by Ramona A. Stone, where the priestess describes herself as a "Good timing drone". The line between human and mechanical is further on obscured, as she sings:

> But I've been having a MIDI-life crisis
> And I've been dreaming in a sleep
> And ape men with metal parts
> I've spat upon deeply felt age
> I've hid my hearts in
> And I hate the funny colored English
> We'll creep together you and I (David Bowie, *segue – Ramona A. Stone/ I Am with Name*).

Accordingly, Ramona prophesizes the coming of a new age, in which humans would achieve immortality by mixing human parts with "metal parts". The blending of various fragmented parts is referenced throughout the album: for example through Minotaur, who is an emblem for the mixture of two parts coming from two different beings (part bull, part human), as well as through Baby Grace Blue's body/work of art, which is changed in order to announce the coming of a new type of human, one that is always connected and one who can achieve immortality.

Baby Grace Blue's body, exposed in front of the Museum of Modern Parts, is not only Minotaur's artistic creation, but the creation of a new type of being altogether. In addition to its web-like appearance, which was discussed before, the body contains a multitude of speakers and translation devices meant to communicate with the outside. Nathan Adler describes he body in his *Diary* as follows:

> The limbs of Baby were then severed from the torso. Each limb was implanted with a small, highly sophisticated, binary-code translator which in turn was connected to small speakers attached to far ends of each limb. The self-contained mini amplifiers were then activated, amplifying the decoded memory info-transport substances, revealing themselves as little

> clue haikus, small verses detailing memories of other brutal acts, well-documented by the ROMbloids (Bowie, *The Diary of Nathan Adler*).

On that account, it is arguable that although Baby Grace Blue is unquestionably deceased, her body may be still alive, generating information. Moreover, in the *The Enemy is Fragile* suite, from the *Leon Recordings*, Baby Grace Blue reveals that her body was prepared prior to the killing: "Ramona put me on these interest drugs so I'm thinking too fast like a brain patch, like I got this soul-brain patch and it's got, I got the shakers on it with this neurotransmitter" (David Bowie, *Leon Recordings*). Therefore, through the drugs, prosthetics, screens, and speakers, Ramona A. Stone and Minotaur attempt to create the perfect cyborg.

Overall, the cyberpunk album reinforces Postmodern themes such as alienation and the relation between humans and technology in the 20th century. *1.Outside* continues Bowie's interest in depicting estrangement, marginal identities, and the impact of popular culture as a replacement for spiritual starvation.

5. Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I have looked at science fiction's status in the larger context of Postmodernism. By analyzing a variety of texts, ranging from novels, to songs, or movies, I have demonstrated that, in Postmodernism, science fiction became a tool for embodying alterity and portraying marginal and fragmented identities. Hence, in the beginning of the chapter I provided a short introduction, which has overviewed the context for science fiction's largely negative critical reception, focusing on its developments in Postmodernism. The next three sections represent the analytical part of the chapter.

In the first analytical section, I have examined the astronaut and space travel, arguing that in Postmodernism, these concepts become symbols for alienation and inadequacy, or the feeling of not fitting in. In order to show that, I have focused on Clarke's and Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, underlining the ways in which it influenced Bowie's *Space Oddity*, released one year later. I have argued that the vast space is perceived as a prison for the characters, who are locked in the institutional space. Moreover, both works emphasize the alienation and loneliness one can experience, not only in space, but in the context of the Cold War too. Thus, while *2001: A Space Odyssey* can be interpreted as a political commentary, *Space Oddity* reinterprets space travel in the context of youth subcultures, as a reaction of drug intake. I have shown how this idea is further on reinforced by Bowie in future songs, such as *Halo Spaceboy* or *Ashes to Ashes*. Finally, I have showed that David Bowie's final album, *Blackstar*, is a commentary on the status of popular culture in Postmodernism: from a scientific symbol, the astronaut becomes the ultimate symbol of a popular star.

Then, I have moved on to discuss some of the aliens present in science fiction. As such, I focused on Ziggy Stardust and Thomas Jerome Newton, and showed that the Postmodern aliens are tools for embodying the alien(ated) or marginal identity. I have addressed the empowering effect Ziggy Stardust, as an alternative pop idol, has on its audiences, through his stage costumes and lyrics. Thus, I have emphasized the ways in which David Bowie uses Ziggy Stardust to circumvent traditional conventions regarding gender, masculinity, or sexual orientation. A similar thing happens in Walter Tevis' and Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, as well as Bowie's and Enda Walsh' *Lazarus*, where Thomas Jerome Newton represents the ultimate alien. Burdened by a Christ-like fate, Newton deconstructs the white male identity, as he points out the failures of the American Dream.

Lastly, I have discussed cyberpunk as a cardinal Postmodernist science fiction genre. In the analysis, I have shown that David Bowie's *1.Outside* album mirrors the fragmented and hybrid Postmodern society, focusing on the relation between art, popular culture, technology, and spirituality. Hence, I have concluded that, by mixing four genres together, the science fiction, the gothic, the hard-boiled detective fiction, and the metafiction, *1.Outside* provides a commentary on the contemporary society in the last years of the millennium.

III. The Gothic

This chapter is going to discuss the relation between gothic and postmodernism, and show how, like science fiction, this genre was initially ignored by critics and then rescued in postmodernism. I will focus on the transgressive potential of the gothic and its subversive techniques, as illustrated in Nick Cave's novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, as well as in his lyrics from the *Murder Ballads* album, released in 1996. Complementary to the novel and songs, I will point out some similarities between Nick Cave's work and Flannery O'Connor's short story collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. Nick Cave has openly admitted in numerous interviews and/or e-mails his fascination with Flannery O'Connor and emphasized the way her texts have influenced his work. Thus, this chapter will show how the two authors depict in their stories traditional (Southern) gothic themes, focusing on the gothic's subversive potential and on the genre's preoccupation with marginal identities and borders.

The first section of this chapter will provide the context for this discussion, as we will follow the genre's development in Europe and, particularly relevant for this thesis, in America. The gothic's ability to project transgressions will be highlighted, as well as the contempt of traditional literary critics for it. Hence, this section is going to show that the gothic's popularity has always been at the frontier between challenging tradition and conforming to the social rules of the period. A final point which is going to be approached in this section is the relation between gothic and postmodernism. More precisely, I am going to look at some elements which make the gothic such a popular genre nowadays, not only for "mass" audiences, but for the educated public and in the academia as well. In other words, I am going to focus on how and why the gothic became an empowering tool, aiding in subverting traditional hierarchies of power.

In the analytical part of the chapter, as mentioned before, I will look at Nick Cave's novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, his album, *Murder Ballads*, and Flannery O'Connor's short story collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. I am going to analyze these texts comparatively, pointing out the gothic's subversive potential in each of them. Julia Kristeva's study on the abject will be of particular importance to the analysis, like Gary Ciuba's book *Desire, Violence & Divinity in Modern Southern Fiction*. As a side note, although most of the other critics categorize *And the Ass Saw the Angel* as Southern gothic fiction, my paper does not agree with this classification;

therefore, I will refer to the text as a simple gothic text. Accordingly, I believe that Nick Cave's relation to Southern gothic is better illustrated in his music, particularly in the *Murder Ballads* album, which is going to be discussed later on, accompanied by Flannery O'Connor's short story collection. Overall, the analysis will emphasize that all three texts reinforce traditional gothic themes such as the fascination with outsiders, borders, and dismantling hierarchies of power, elements which can be perceived as empowering in postmodernism.

1. The Gothic: A History of Transgression

The Gothic has often been defined as either a literary genre or an aesthetic impulse. Anne Williams refuses to call it a genre, saying that "the gothic is a fluid tendency rather than a discrete literary 'mode', an impulse rather than a literary artifact" (A. Williams qtd in Savoy 6). Maria Beville agrees with Anne Williams, as she says that the term "Gothic" has been overused in our society, which has led to a "a romantic notion of Gothic as a style or aesthetic", that overlooks its more subtle qualities, that are "less obviously distinguishable" (8). Critics such as Markman Ellis have also accused those who limit the gothic to a simple genre definition, calling this approach "bibliographical and classificatory", rather than "hermeneutic" (Ellis 12). However, he points out that the categorization of gothic as a genre is part of the effort of early 20th century criticism, such as Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* (1921), Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917), or Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle* (1927) to find a place for the gothic in the larger literary tradition.

The gothic's perception as an aesthetic rather than an entirely distinct genre is what may explain its popularity in different eras, as well as the generic ease of mixing it with other various genres, as we have seen in cyberpunk's case. Following Reid's definition of a genre, wherein he claims that the concept of the genre is not stable, but able to change its form according to the era in which it is written (Reid 209), Maria Beville draws the conclusion that the concept of genre is "inherently linked to context and culture", becoming "a voice for the ideological and social discourses that define an age and subsequently propose modes of identification to readers" (Beville 20). The instability of the genre is underlined when trying to define the gothic, as the genre has suffered numerous changes throughout its history and was able to change itself in order to fit the requirements of one period or another. Hence, this paper will refer to the gothic as a genre rather than as an aesthetic impulse, while also taking into account the genre's changing character.

It is generally agreed that the first work which can be catalogued as "gothic" is Horace Walpole's novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, published in the second half of the 18th century, in 1764. The genre shows its subversive potential from the very beginning and, through depictions of barbarous pasts, supernatural apparitions, and irrational fears, it contradicts the Enlightenment's focus on rationality and logic. As such, Fred Bottling notes that the term "gothic" is used derogatorily throughout the 18th century, as a way to imply "the lack of reason, morality and beauty of feudal beliefs, customs and work" (Bottling 34). Hence, the gothic's association with low

culture is assumed throughout the 18th century. Moreover, as Fred Bottling underlines, the gothic's understanding as an inferior genre is also made by its comparison with romanticism. He says that, while the romantic poets were said to depict "a nature of sublimity and imagination" (27), "gothic finds itself relegated to the popular and trashy realm of cheap, formulaic fiction" (Bottling 7).

Although gothic has been frequently called a subgenre of romanticism, Anne Williams argues that these are not altogether different genres, but the "male" and "female" of the same genre (1). By the same token, Charles Crow notes that many gothic texts, including the previously mentioned *The Castle of Otranto*, "actually appear in the Neoclassical period and precede the landmark works of early Romanticism" (Crow 3). In this sense, it is erroneous to call the gothic a sub-genre of romanticism. However, the fact that the two genres are often analyzed in relation to each other may be a consequence of their subversive endeavor, as they challenge the enlightened paradigm by focusing on emotion and passion rather than logic. Thus,

> If the Age of Reason valued balanced, symmetry, mature and ration thought, orderly gardens, law and well-designed institutions, the Romantics favoured individual freedom, untamed nature, disorder, emotion, dreams and innocent childhood (Crow 4).

However, the gothic writers, as compared to romantics, were fascinated by objects which were perceived as "negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic" (Bottling 1). Presumably, this is what led to the gothic's exclusion by the critics, who often condemned the genre for corrupting its audience.

Even though the genre was dismissed by early critics, gothic continued to fascinate readers. In *Contemporary Gothic*, Catherine Spooner argues that the gothic taste has always been associated with the consumer culture,

> since thrilling tales of spectres and superstitions failed to fulfil the Enlightenment demand that literature be instructive, supernatural fiction became the ultimate luxury product, conceived purely in terms of excess (Spooner 24).

Thus, according to Catherine Spooner, gothic's popularity is based on its ability to transgress the norms and defy the predominant culture of the time. The gothic's popularity is illustrated not only in the large numbers of readers which devoured gothic novels, but also in the massive advances gothic writers commanded for their novels. Some gothic novels, such as Wilkie Collins' *The*

Woman in White (1859) or George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), generated massive amounts of merchandise, and products such as "Trilby shoes, sweets, soaps, sausages, concerts, parties and, of course, the celebrated Trilby hat" (Spooner 24) were in high demand in the 19th and 20th century. The critical authorities of the time, however, attributed the gothic's popularity to its cheapness, claiming that its audience is made up of "middleclass misses, or later in the nineteenth century by servants and shop-girls", frequently criticized for their "moral laxity and nervous over-excitement" (Spooner 24-25).

William Veeder explains the gothic's popularity from another perspective, calling it an act of spiritual cleansing. He notes that "years when hysteria proliferates" are also times of gothic revival (Veeder 36). He gives as an example the end of the 19th century, which coincides with the publication of the most famous gothic novels, such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Dracula*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *The Turn of the Screw*, or *The Yellow Wallpaper*. He argues that the gothic revival, along with the birth of psychoanalysis, accompany the repression of the carnivalesque (36). Thus, gothic fiction replaces the carnivalesque in the popular realm, inheriting its preoccupation with excess, focus on outsiders, fascination for grotesque bodies, and crossing boundaries. By replacing the carnival, William Veeder argues that "gothic does self-healing through terror" (34). Accordingly, the gothic is a necessary tool for social healing, and Veeder notes that it functions in the same way in which shamanic healing works: by projecting "terrifying desires onto the dark Other" (Veeder 34).

It could be argued that the gothic text voices the cultural anxieties of the period in which it is written. As such, Fred Bottling shows that 18th century gothic novels are filled with "mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits" (Bottling 2). Additionally, these texts usually conform to the moral rules of the era: the villains are punished, while the heroines are well married (Bottling 7). 19th century gothic reveals the uncertainties that result from the French revolution and the instability of the political and social class. Hence, the villains are represented, at this point, by the aristocracy, to which are added the "scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals" (Bottling 2).

Moreover, as Fred Bottling says, in the 19th century "Gothic became part of an internalized world of guilt, anxiety, despair, a world of transgression interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge" (Bottling 7). Therefore, most of the gothic texts in that period question authority and punish the perversion of knowledge. This is visible in the way

in which the villains are portrayed, as "the lawyer or judge; the schoolmaster, and the abusive scientist or doctor" (Crow 4). This attitude is highlighted by novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Nathaniel Hawthorne *The Scarlet Letter*, which illustrate the consequences of the abuse of knowledge or the destructive conduct of abusive husbands.

The popularity of the gothic genre was not only specific for European countries, but it spread over to America as well. More than that, gothic seems to have fascinated the American literature to the extent of becoming its national literature, as Leslie Fiedler shows in his study *Love and Death in the American Novel*, where he says that "the American novel is pre-eminently a novel of terror" (Fiedler xxi). In his essays, he often blames the critics for overlooking this aspect of American literature, accusing them of blindly following the "Great Realist" tradition, which was definitory for Europe. He argues that "American literature is distinguished by the number of dangerous and disturbing books in its canon – and American scholarship by its ability to conceal this fact" (Fiedler ix). In order to prove his point, Fiedler looks at three of the most canonic American novels: Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. He shows in this study that American writers, including the above-mentioned ones, have developed in their writings traditionally Gothic themes, as they displayed a pattern of fascination with "death, incest and innocent homosexuality" (Fiedler xi).

According to Fiedler, terror has been a defining trait of American literature since its beginning. He considers terror to be a consequence of the Americans' relation to their land, arguing that

> through these gothic images are projected certain obsessive concerns of our national life: the ambiguity of our relationship with the Indian and Negro, the ambiguity of our encounter with nature, the guilt of the revolutionist who feels himself a parricide - and, not least of all, the uneasiness of the writer who cannot help believing that the very act of composing a book is Satanic revolt (Fiedler, *Love and Death* xii).

Therefore, the gothic seems the most suitable mode of dealing with the terrors posed by the new, unknown, and untamed land. However, as Fiedler points out, the gothic has become the national American literature without the acknowledgement of the critical scene.

Moreover, Fiedler shows that both the major and the minor writers were influenced by the same gothic themes, which have dominated American literature since its origins: “the images of alienation, flight, and abysmal fear possess our fiction. Until the gothic had been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin” (Fiedler, *Love and Death* 126). Additionally, Charles Crow believes that the gothic “represented a counter-narrative, undercutting the celebration of progress, inquiring about its costs and the omissions from the story” (17), such as the slaughtering of Native Americans, the atrocities of slavery, or the witchcraft hunts (most notably the Salem witch trials). American gothic writers, Charles Crow argues, kept on “asking troubling questions” (17), undermining the narrative of innocence promoted by the pursuing of the American dream.

It is important to underline that the Americans did not import the gothic in its European form, but made some changes for it to fit their narrative. Thus, as opposed to Europe, where gothic literature was filled with monsters, ghosts, and all sorts of supernatural apparitions, the American gothic was focused on the psyche and on the evil within the human. American gothic aimed its attention at what Crevecoeur calls the realizations of the terrors of slavery, arguing that through the gothic the Americans realized that “We are not who we believed ourselves to be” (quoted in Crow 24). This leads to the gothic developing regionally in America, telling the stories of small towns and rural communities, where heritage and the history of the place play a big part.

1.1 Contemporary Gothic

Alongside science fiction, the gothic is one of the most popular genres of the 20th and 21st centuries. Nowadays it is not only present in literature, it has expanded to encompass most of what popular means: video games, movies, advertising, tv shows, fashion, music, or even furniture. As such, the gothic taste has become marketable late-capitalism, and Catherine Spooner concludes that "Above all, gothic sells" (Spooner 23).

Spooner, however, notes some discrepancies between traditional gothic and postmodernist gothic. She claims that, in contemporary culture, the gothic has lost its ability to scare us, which illustrates the "void at the heart of an advanced consumer culture" (Spooner 155). Moreover, Fred Bottling argues that "Once the dark under side of modernity, Gothic horror now outlines the darkness of the postmodern condition" (Bottling quoted in Spooner 155). Maria Beville also reports the appearance of a new type of gothic, called "candygothic" or superficial gothic (9). By candygothic she refers to vampire movies or tv series such as *Twilight,* which highlight gothic conventions and are aimed at young readers, which, according to her, underline our "predisposition to concentrate on Gothic stylistic conventions" (9). The reason for gothic's popularity is, according to Maria Beville, the fact that gothic is the "clearest mode of expression in literature for voicing the terrors of postmodernity" (8). Such terrors of Postmodernity may be terrorism, pollution, nuclear annihilation, or a worldwide pandemic.

Catherine Spooner also argues that the gothic has been unfairly treated by mass media, and she blames the popular culture for comically portraying goth subcultures. She notes that goth teenagers are generally portrayed in a negative fashion, as stereotypical characters in movies or tv shows (Spooner 93). For example, Ellis Barry characterizes them in a *Boston Phoenix* article as teenagers "alienated by their parents, who were prosperous, and by their classmates, who were preppy, and by the culture at large, which was cheerful" (quoted in Spooner 94). However, she believes that the negative aura around them in the mass media may be related to their "seek to enact symbolic resistance through a controversial and clearly recognizable visual style" (Spooner 94), similar to the way in which Dick Hebdige defined the punk subculture. Moreover, she believes "contemporary teenage gothic articulates a tension between mainstream mass entertainment and a subcultural rebellion" (Spooner 87). Rob Latham further on argues that in the gothic subculture

> consumption … becomes for teens both an avenue of self-expression and also of objectification in the form of fashion. The result is an ambivalent dialectic of empowerment and exploitation, in which teens are both consumers and consumed, vampires and victims (Laham 67).

Hence, although the goth subculture is a very consumerist type of culture, it seeks subversion through commodification.

Gothic has frequently been criticized for being popular, and this was taken as a sign of bad quality. However, throughout history, as hinted before, gothic showed a predisposition for challenging hierarchies, blurring boundaries, and uncovering secrets. As Lucie Armitt puts it,

> while contemporary Gothic can be critiqued, like postmodernism, as being concerned only with surfaces and commodification, it can also be seen to remain preoccupied with material concerns such as "poverty, race and sexual discrimination" (Armitt 152).

Most importantly, the gothic has always been concerned with the social construction of the "other", and although, as discussed above, early Gothic fiction tended to punish transgression, this is not necessarily the case in more modern reiterations of gothic texts. As Charles Crow claimed, the gothic is mostly interested in asking the questions, rather than providing a clear answer. Readers are more important in gothic literature, as "gothic fiction is a potential space precisely because actualization depends upon each individual reader" (Veeder 38). Thus, whether the gothic is subversive or conformist is a matter of who is reading the text.

The genre has also become a powerful tool in fighting injustice in the hands of feminist critics. Anne Williams, for example, blames the traditional critics for failing to recognize the gothic's subversive potential, and accuses them of having trapped the genre into "an outmoded embarrassment" (2). By failing to objectively address the gothic, she says that the "Realism-centered critics" dismiss the relevance of gothic discourses in modern societies (A. Williams 2). Furthermore, she claims that the main reason the gothic is considered inferior is due to its association with the romance, which is regarded as "'feminine' in contrast to Realistic novel's focus on manners, morals, society, and consciousness" (3).

Anne Williams also points out that the general critical reception of the gothic defines the genre as opposed to Romantic fiction. Hence, such critics do not recognize the similarities between

the two genres, and clearly seem to argue that one is objectively better than the other. Williams shows not only that Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth, openly admitted their fascination with gothic themes, but that they were also familiar with the gothic works of their time, as it is revealed by Byron, Shelley, or Keats in their texts. Thus, she claims that "There is no easy way to distinguish between early Gothic and several texts we count among the masterpieces of Romantic poetry" (3). Furthermore, by clearly drawing a boundary between the two,

> the student is not invited to consider the thematic affinities between Keats or Coleridge and this sometimes inept and lurid prose [gothic]. Nor is one encouraged to notice that Gothic prose of the 1790s is in fact disturbingly 'poetic' (Anne Williams 4).

In this instance, similarly to the discussion regarding the process of canon formation, it is emphasized once more how, throughout history, established critical schools, intentionally or not, overlooked certain texts and even genres in their analyses.

Additionally, Anne Williams blames critics such as Harold Bloom, MH Abrams, Paul de Man, or Geoffrey Hartman for defending established traditional attitudes regarding the gothic genre. As such, she accuses them of purposefully overlooking the relationship between romantic and gothic fiction:

> Bloom imported the Viennese philosopher of unreason [Kant] into his theory of poetic influence, his Freud speaks only to the spiritual struggles of fathers and sons; he has nothing to say about Keats's relation to his "Mother Radcliff" (Williams 5).

Gothic's association with the feminine is what led to a negative critical reception, critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar furthermore argue. They say that disregarding the gothic is part of a greater effort to disregard women's works in general (see Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic). Accordingly, by defining the gothic as a "culturally 'feminine' phenomenon", it is inherently defined as a "a celebration of emotion, intuition, and the child" (Williams 5).

The relation between the gothic and the empowerment of women is emphasized in the 1970s by critics such as Tanya Modleski, Kate Ellis, or Michelle Masse. Gilbert and Gubar's study, "Women Writers and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination" uncovers a metaphor in Charlotte Bronte's fiction which would be definitory for this movement: "the madwoman in the attic". "The "madwoman in the attic" is a perfect description of not only gothic's status in the field

of literary studies, but that of women throughout history. Hence, Catherine Spooner summarizes the gothic's journey from an overlooked genre in the academia to one of the most popular, as she says:

> now Gothic is all the rage because it can ostensibly be used as a tool of subversion against the cultural elite. Gothic has apparently become popular among academics because it is invested with the thrill of the forbidden, which in this context is not entirely different from the thrill of the low-brow. Suddenly, Gothic is PC: championed by feminists and queer theorists for its level of attention to women and non-heteronormative sexualities; the reading material of the masses; the space in which the burdens of colonial guilt could be explored and exorcised (Spooner 24-25).

Therefore, in Postmodernism the gothic is appreciated for its capacity to address various social issues. As we showed in the theoretical chapter, the social efficacy of a work of art is more important in Postmodernity than aesthetics: accordingly, the gothic becomes a powerful tool which can empower marginal voices and identities. Overall, the following sections of the chapter are going to emphasize the gothic's subversive potential and its preoccupation with outsiders.

2. *And the Ass Saw the Angel*: Borders and Abjection

And the Ass Saw the Angel is a novel written by Nick Cave and published in 1989, which centers around a fictive religious community. The Ukulites, as they are called, are presented through the eyes of Euchrid Eucrow, who is an outsider, as well as the villain of the story. Hence, this section will look at the subversive way in which Nick Cave uses the gothic in order to challenge conventional assumptions and empower marginal identities.

The first part of this analysis will focus on the setting and determine whether it constitutes a locale with subversive potential. Taking into account that, in American gothic, the regional particularities play a big part in constituting the general theme, this portion of the paper will examine the relations of power and hierarchies according to which the Ukulite community is organized. Moreover, at the same time, it will show that Nick Cave deconstructs the traditional community, underlining its faults and pointing out their failure to follow their own dogma. Overall, this section will argue that the Ukulite community is not any better than the villain it stigmatizes.

The second part of this section will focus on the main components of a gothic text: the haunted house, the unreliable narrator, the innocent victim, and the blood-thirsty villain. The focal point of the analysis is Euchrid Eucrow, who embarks on a journey of self-discovery which ends with his identification with abjection. Julia Krysteva's study on abjection will be of utmost importance, as it underlines the way in which "othering" works, emphasizing the fundamental discrepancy between the Ukulites, who perceive themselves as righteous, and Euchrid, who is haunted by a long history of affliction.

2.1 The Setting

The setting plays an important part in gothic fiction, serving a prophetic and a revelatory function. As argued above, in America, the gothic developed regionally, focusing on depictions of rural communities or small towns. As Leslie Fiedler points out, the setting illustrates the troubled relationship between the individual and the land, which is perceived as haunted, cursed, or untamable. Thus, it is important to properly situate Nick Cave's novel from a geographic perspective.

Out of all the regions in the United States, the South and New England have the richest gothic heritage. A common feature of these regional gothic texts is the small town, often idealized in American literature, that is now portrayed as haunted, filled with secrets, and ruled by fear. The force which terrorizes the small town is not a supernatural being, but it is a consequence of the secrets and mysteries which define the community. Hence, writer Alice Cary claims that while, to an outsider, may appear as boring everyday routines, for somebody who has lived his/her entire life in the same place, and is aware of the place's history and all of its inhabitants, "the realism of the commonplace and the Gothic are never far apart" (quoted in Crow 67).

Alice Cary's remarks are valid for the Ukulite community presented in Nick Cave's novel as well. Although the narrator does not clearly say in which state the Ukulore Valley is, there are hints scattered throughout the narration that allow us to approximately situate the region: references such as the proximity to an industrial city named Davenport, the Road to Maine, or the Mississippi river point to rural Iowa. Iowa is also home to Grant Wood's famous painting, *American Gothic*, which depicts a farmer and his daughter in Eldon, a small establishment in the state. The painting reveals what Thomas Lawson calls "an edge of unsettledness", which discloses a "claustrophobia of the spirit among the rolling fields" (77), an atmosphere which perturbes Cave's fictional valley as well. Evil seems to be making its way through the sugar cane fields, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

Additionally, Jonathan Raban argues that *American Gothic* depicts the "sad and unlamented West where bitterness and fury were the natural offspring of impossibly great expectations" (62). The dichotomy identified by Raban in the painting is also illustrated by Nick Cave in his novel. Thus, the villagers of the Ukulore Valley seem caught in between two worlds: the dark road, which leads down into the deep South, and the salvation road, going up to Maine.

Moreover, the villagers are constantly trapped between their own expectations of themselves, and the sourness which comes as a consequence of their real, sinful existence.

The prologue opens with a description of the valley as seen by the antagonist, during the last moments before his death. Having committed a capital sin, by killing young Beth, nature presents itself to Euchrid as an angered beast: "For so long the lid of the valley was clear and blue but now, by God, it roars. From where ah lie the clouds look prehistorical, belching forth great faceless beats that curl'n'die, like that, above" (Cave e-book). Hence, in this fragment, nature is personified, and its main purpose seems to be Euchrid's punishment. However, it is important to note that nature's behavior is a consequence of God's anger, as explained by Euchrid. The God we encounter in this novel, as we will see later on, is a God who likes to punish and watch people suffering, akin to the God of the Old Testament. Nick Cave confessed his interest in the Old Testament and God in numerous interviews, saying that the God of the Old Testament "seemed a cruel and rancorous God and I loved the way he would wipe out entire nations at a whim" (qtd in Alderton 170).

The second page of the prologue switches narrators, and Euchrid is replaced by an unnamed narrator, who offers a more detached description of the valley, prior to the events which culminate in God's fury. This section is meant to introduce the reader to the fictional community and set the atmosphere for the story that is about to be presented:

> There below! O little valley!
>
> Two shattered knees of land rise and open to make a crease between. Down the bitten innerflank we go, where trees laden with thick vines grow upon the trembling slopes. Some hang out into the valley at dangerous angles, their worried roots rising from the hillside soil as they suffer the creeping burden that trusses and binds and weighs like the world across their limbs. This knitted creeper, these trees, all strung one to one and chained to the ground by vine.
>
> Travelling the length of the valley, south to north, as the crow flies, we follow its main road as it weaves its way along the flat of the valley's belly. From up here it could be a ribbon, as we pass over the first of many hundreds of acres of smouldering cane (Cave e-book).

The opening paragraph is premonitory of the valley's grim destiny, and the narrator's gentle remark "O little valley" (Cave e-book) is a first clue, suggesting the hardship that is about to happen. Moreover, the crow, which introduces us to the fictional valley, is yet another traditional gothic symbol of death or bad news. Hence, following the crow, we go along the main road, descending into the valley. The descent is itself an illustration of the community's blindness: hidden in between hills, the community seems to atone for some immemorial sin.

The valley's shape once again reinforces a dichotomy. Situated in between two hills which are compared to knees, the valley's location is paralleled with the genital area. Hence, the discrepancy between sex as pleasure and sex as reproduction is a recurring motif in the narration. While the men seem caught in their own businesses, conflicted between saving their image as righteous fathers or leaders and admitting to having visited the valley's prostitute, the women are preoccupied with the prosperity of the community. Similarly to the way in which the sugar cane production brings well-being to its inhabitants, the figure of the mother dominates the fertile valley. The long period of rain, which halts the sugar cane plantation from prospering, is ended by the birth of a child. Accordingly, the valley's fruitfulness is mirrored by the ability of the village to nurture a child.

The Ukulites' inability to properly take care of the child is what brings God's anger upon them. When Beth dies, the rains cover the valley again. Moreover, the women who do not fit the idealistic image of the nurturing mother are punished throughout the novel. Rebecca Sardust kills herself after finding out that she is unable to bear children, while Cosey Mo is almost beaten to death because she enjoys sex merely for pleasure, not for reproduction. Queenie and Jane Crow are also punished for not fitting the mother figure and loving alcohol more than they love their family. Whilst Queenie does not have any children (or ones that we know about), Jane Crow, Euchrid's mother, torments her child and husband, drinking herself to death.

The description of the trees is another instance in which the nature is personified. The trees with "worried roots" go on with their existence, unaware that they are slowly being suffocated by vines. As we can notice in the second part of the novel, which centers around Beth's upbringing, we see that the villagers, similarly to how the vines suffocate the trees, are overprotective of Beth and end up sucking all life out of her. Charles Crow argues that, in gothic texts, "the rural community, and the small town, so long idealized in American culture, remain subjects of Gothic counter-narrative" (Crow 161). Peaceful rural communities, such as this one, often hide terrible

secrets. The prosperity of the village is paid by a single child, considered miraculous by the society, who is believed to have the power to keep God's anger at bay. While Beth is innocent, the rain, which has devastated the crops for three straight years, stops. The community systematically follows Beth's each step and does not allow her to properly enjoy her childhood. However, by showing that Beth chooses death over a long life in the community, Nick Cave provides a counter-narrative to the small, idyllic and idealized community, which emphasizes the irrecuperable damage such an attitude leads to.

The description of the trees is also a reference to the villagers' connection with the land. As the narrator points out, "This knitted creeper, these trees, all strung one to one and chained to the ground by vine" (Cave e-book), is suggestive of the Ukulites' long history of what seems to be their sacred land. As noted in the second chapter of the novel, the Ukulites arrive in the valley in 1862, guided by prophet Jonas Ukulore, "a Welsh convert to the Baptism faith, [who] began to heave revelations" (Cave e-book) in which he was announced to be the "Seventh Angel". After his excommunication by the church, he and his followers proceed to search for a place in which they could stablish "the new Fold" (Cave e-book). After years of roaming, the small community encounters the deserted valley, which is perceived to be in "a state of divine pendency" (Cave e-book). Hence, the discovery of the valley appears to the villagers as a holy sign, a proof of God's mercy, and yet another reason to see themselves as His Chosen people.

The next ten years following their settlement in the valley coincide with a boom in the community's development. Joseph Ukulore, the prophet's brother, provides the practical guidance which allows the cane production to increase and establishes trade relations with near-by establishments, such as Davenport. However, the valley's flourishment is interrupted by Jonas Ukulore's visions, who once again claims that the community needs to leave and find another shelter. According to him, "the second coming was at hand and all must prepare for the imminent crusade out of the valley" (Cave e-book). In 1892, as the villagers are about to leave the valley, the prophet is unexpectedly killed by a sniper and dies instantly, which leads to the Ukulites' postponing their journey, for lack of another guide.

Although the villagers suspect that the killer is an outsider to their community, the narrator hints that the actual murderer is the prophet's brother. Rational-minded, Joseph Ukulore sees the potential of the valley and does not agree with his brother's visions and his decision to leave. Knowing that he has no chance of convincing him to stay, Jonas determines that the best course

of action is to turn his brother into the first martyr of the community. Consequently, for years, the Ukulites wait for another prophet to come and provide additional guidance. As the years pass, the Ukulites welcome other religions in the valley, and slowly Joseph Ukulore remains just a memory, a statue in the center of the village, or a ghost meant to haunt and seek revenge.

Consequently, Ukulore Valley's genesis is marked by fratricide. Much as the Ukulites pride themselves on being a model protestant community, they are unaware, or most likely refuse to admit, that at the heart of the community lies a terrible sin. Akin to the trees that are "chained to the ground by vine" (Cave e-book), the Ukulites are linked together by this heinous crime, to which they are all indirect accomplices. The motif of the fratricide is recurrent in the novel, and we see it reoccurring in various instances: for example, when Euchrid claims that he killed his twin brother, named #1, in the womb, or when Kike kills Abie Poe, who he argued was like a brother to him. As such, the fratricide is one of the gothic sins in the novel which are doomed to repeat, and for which the Ukulites must atone.

Gothic's obsession with borders and limits is also evident in the way in which the valley is organized. At the center of the valley we have Jonas Ukulore's statue, coinciding with the valley's moral and spiritual heart. Next to it, in Memorial Square, there is a statue of an angel holding a sickle. The statue is also a premonitory sign, as Beth, the holy child idolized by the village, will be hit with a sickle on the exact same spot towards the end of the novel. Close to the center live the Ukulites, and then the other religious communities. Near, along the Road to Maine, there are the cane fields and the workers. Further away from the city, "toward the tarred clapboard shacks … live the outcast, the hobos, the hill-trash" (Cave e-book). Euchrid's house is right behind this, the last stop before the swampland.

Thus, the way in which the valley is organized corresponds to a moral axis. At the center, there are the law-abiding citizens, and the more you depart from it, the more you descend into darkness and immorality. The ultimate destination, the farthest away from the village, is the swampland. As Roland Boer notes, the "swamp is a space of mythological creatures of fearsome proportions" for the Ukulites (Boer 315). The narrator describes the swamp as follows:

> The Ukulites believed the swampland to be an abomination. They believed that it would erupt and smite the valley should their God become displeased. At the school, the Ukulite elders would hammer the heads of their children, with a fervor wrought of utter conviction, telling them that it was a diabolic macula on Zion and that within its bounds roamed all the

> infernal evils of the world. The children, so frightened were they, rarely ventured past the northern city limit (Cave e-book)

The Ukulites consider the village a safe spot and everything outside of it is a potential danger. They chase away the "hobos", Euchrid included, and do not allow their children to venture behind the village limits. They are afraid of those who are perceived as outsiders and, moreover, they destroy all that they do not understand. For example, when they stumble across Euchrid's hideout in the swampland, they are outraged by it, and decide to burn it.

Identifying as a God-loving community, populated by good people, the Ukulites perceive themselves as righteous. They believe that as long as they serve God, they are protected. Nick Cave's song, *God Is in the House*, released a few years after the novel was written, furthermore illustrates this attitude as Cave sings:

> The tipsy, the reeling and the drop down pissed
> We got no time for that stuff here
> Zero crime and no fear
> We've bred all our kittens white
> So that you can see them in the night
> And at night we're on our knees
> As quiet as a mouse
> …….
> God is in the house (Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, *God Is in the House*).

In order to keep the illusion of their community being a role-model, the Ukulites often decide to ignore inside behaviors which do not fit their narrative. Similarly to how they have overlooked Jonas' crime, they ignore other related sins. Accordingly, while they blame the outsiders for the same sins, they choose to purposefully disregard the fact that such sins exist within their community as well. Hence, as the song hints, one may wonder what happens in that town to the cats who are born black or some other color?

The villagers have divided views on sin and immortality. If a transgressive act is performed by outsiders, they seek to punish it. However, if one of them does it, then it can be overlooked. Hence, while the villagers consider Euchrid's behavior animalistic, as we will see later on, because he collects carcasses of animals and bloody bandages, they fail to acknowledge real violent

behaviors in their own community. For example, at one point, Euchrid witnesses a scene in which two teenagers rape a girl, and later on, two smaller children murder Euchrid's dog. As such, there is also a lot of violence, alcoholism, and impiety in the village as well, but the Ukulites refuse to address them. However, they have no problems punishing the outsiders for the same sins: they hit and chase Euchrid, but still see their own children as angels. Moreover, they beat Cosey Mo to death, but they do not have any reaction when the prostitute names the men from the village who have come to visit her.

The people in the *God Is in the House* song, like the Ukulites, purposefully control their environment in order to make it appear more righteous. Whereas in the song they breed all the cats to be exclusively white, in the novel the villagers also construct their own narratives regarding righteousness. For example, the characters argue that beauty is to be found inside of a person, not on the outside. However, when Cosey Mo's stoning takes place, Mrs. Eldridge, the "cripple", and also the most aesthetically ugly person in the village, according to the narrator, is the one who is the most vocal and filled with hatred. Thus, the text emphasizes that she does not punish Cosey Mo for being ugly inside, but for being beautiful on the outside. The reality is that she is jealous and resentful and wants Cosey Mo to be as ugly as she is. The Ukulites hide their feelings of hatred by claiming that they are punishing in the name of God. Moreover, another instance in which the Ukulites are deceitful is when the women discover that Beth is no longer a virgin and they decide to keep it a secret, willingly reinforcing a lie.

Overall, Nick Cave deconstructs the narrative of the righteous small town by emphasizing the hypocrisy and pretense in the Ukulite community. Although they may appear as an ideal community, one who knows the history of the place or gets to actually know the inhabitants of the valley, soon discovers the bigotry which has taken over. The villagers are not better from a moral point of view, they only have the authority over righteousness, and they get to decide which behaviors are appropriate and which not. Hence, the text illustrates the way in which the gothic can be used as a subversive tool in fighting authority.

2.3 *And the Ass Saw the Angel*: Southern Gothic?

Another issue which should be addressed in relation to the regional aspect of *And the Ass Saw the Angel* is its classification as a Southern narrative. Although, as we have seen before, the geographical hints place the Ukulore Valley in rural Iowa, most of the critics who analyzed Cave's novel, such as Ken Gelder, Jason K Friedman, Roland Boer, or Carole Hart, and even the text on the back cover, all claim that the novel is part of the Southern gothic tradition. Moreover, they assert that the narrator does not provide a precise location for Ukulore Valley's location, and this allows them to look at the text under the assumption that the plot happens in the South. Hence, I believe that they overlook the clues which are clearly reinforced in the text: the "Road to Maine" traversing the valley, the proximity of the Mississippi river, and the fact that the Ukulites sell the sugar cane to the near-by city of Davenport. Clearly, the only American state which fits all these requirements is Iowa.

Therefore, classifying the novel as Southern gothic seems paradoxical. The state of Iowa is not part of the American South, but it is a representative state for the Midwest. Thus, how is it possible that a novel which lacks any reference to the South, or any racial conflict, can be so overwhelmingly considered "Southern" by critics? I believe Jason K Friedman's article '"Ah Am Witness to Its Authenticity" Goth Style in Postmodern Southern Writing', which we are about to discuss in the following paragraphs, offers a solution to this dilemma. Yet, in order to do that, we first need to define Southern gothic as a literary genre.

The term "Southern gothic" was initially used by Ellen Glassgow in her article "Heroes and Monsters" (1935) to describe texts which deal with "aimless violence" (3), where she included works by writers such as William Faulkner or Erskine Caldwell. Traditionally, Southern gothic is defined as a regional genre, which focuses on the American South that "serves as the nation's 'other' (4). In this way, critic Teresa Goddu argues, the South becomes the repository for everything from which the nation wishes to dissociate itself" (4). Thus, although Southern gothic retains gothic characteristics such as irrationality and fascination with the dark aspects of the human psyche, it tends to be more realistic, disposing of the fantastic plots or creatures which were often encountered in European gothic.

Jason Friedman distinguishes between two types of Southern writings: Southern gothic, and Southern Goth (or simply Goth). Although in both types of writing the South is used as a

setting, the difference is that while in Southern gothic the "literal content" is Southern and the "metaphorical design" is Gothic (Friedman's terms), in Goth it is the other way around. In other words, in Southern gothic authors speak about the South (its people, behaviors, traditions) employing gothic techniques (themes or motifs such as violence, dysfunctional families, curses, hereditary omens), while in Goth the authors are not necessarily interested in the South as a place, but they use the Southern setting in order to bring forward a set of assumptions associated with the South (Friedman 197). Consequently, if William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor use gothic as a way to describe the South, and can be catalogued as Southern gothic writers, Postmodern writers such as Stephen King, Anne Rice, or Nick Cave, Friedman argues, are simply Goths (197-198).

The reasons Friedman associates Nick Cave's novel with the South is related in part to the novel's "faux Faulkner[ian]" style of writing (Friedman 210), with the narrator mixing the low and high style, and the set of characters, definitory for the Southern setting. These "Southern stock characters" are, according to Friedman, the "hypocritical preacher man, kindhearted prostitute pariah, assorted inbred types, and a heartless sectarian Baptist community" (Friedman 206). As such, although Nick Cave's novel does not explicitly happen in the South, it still elaborates on Southern themes and depicts traditional Southern characters. The South, in this scenario, is not a geographical place, but a sense of disquiet, illustrative of a decadent world, filled with amoral or immoral characters.

However, in this chapter we are not going to emphasize the Southern gothic elements present in the novel, since I think that they are more typical of the Midwestern region, as we have argued above, in relation with Grant Wood's painting. Moreover, the fact that there is no racial conflict whatsoever in the novel, and no mention of any Southern social emblems (such as the plantation, or the white mansion), reinforces my decision to keep the South proper out of my analysis of *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. Nonetheless, we are going to explore more about the way in which Nick Cave relates to Southern gothic when we discuss his association with Flannery O'Connor, in the second half of this chapter. The album we are going to analyze, *Murder Ballads*, is actually set in the South, and, thus, I believe it serves as a better exemplification of Cave's relation with the South than this novel.

Rather than being Southern, I think this novel illustrates, once again, Cave's passion for telling stories which take place in small towns or villages and which concern religious communities. The same themes are to be found throughout Cave's career, in particular in the

albums that he and his band released in the 1990s. Hence, albums such as *The Good Son*, in which the singer tuns his attention to the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, *Henry's Dream*, in which various small town quarrels are related, or *No More Shall We Part*, which features the above-mentioned song, *God Is in the House*, are just a few examples of Nick Cave's interest in reclusive rural communities and their relationship with God. As such, *And the Ass Saw the Angel* is just another instance in which the writer and singer attempts to tell the story of a small town and its inhabitants.

Moreover, by using gothic tools, the writer is able to tell the stories of those who were ostracized by such communities, such as Euchrid in this case, or the various murderers, thieves, or queer characters present throughout his songs. In other words, by employing gothic techniques, the singer can relate stories from the outsider's perspective. This makes the novel not only gothic, but Postmodernist as well, as the ex-centric is allowed to take the main stage and he is free to tell his own story. We will come back to this theme when we discuss Euchrid's obsession for writing and his inability to talk.

2.3 Gothic Elements

Having discussed the novel's geographical particularities and presented a general overview of the Ukulite community, the following part will look more in-depth at the gothic elements which make up the rest of the story. Accordingly, we are going to look at the way in which various families are presented throughout the novel, at the gothic houses which they inhabit, at the way in which curses and heredity work, and, finally, at the way in which marginal and transgressive characters are presented in the narrative.

a) The Gothic Family

The first gothic theme we are going to look at is that of the family. As Anne Williams observes, "literally and metaphorically, Gothic plots are family plots; Gothic romance is family romance" (Williams 22). Accordingly, the family is one of the core units of gothic texts, and this is the case in Nick Cave's novel as well. However, having discussed the genre's fascination for aberrant behaviors and trespassing borders, the traditional notion of the family is generally challenged in gothic texts. As we will see in the following paragraphs, in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, Nick Cave questions traditional values regarding the family, subverting the patriarchal images which proliferate in small communities such as the Ukulites'.

In Nick Cave's novel, the community is prosperous when everybody knows exactly what to do and is aware of the limits of freedom. Hence, every person appears to be doing what s/he is meant to do: the priest preaches, the mayor leads, the men works the fields, the women are concerned with the household, and the children play. As such, there does not seem to be a lot of decision-making involved in the Ukulites' day to day life, as they peacefully follow their course without ever questioning their behavior. As we have argued before, the Ukulites do not like interruptions and perturbations from the outside: they chase Euchrid when they spot him lurking in the town's center, and they banish the prostitute from keeping on with her business. Not even the hired outsider cane workers or beggars are allowed to come close to the town, and they are housed in improvised trailers next to the cane fields. By keeping all the outsiders at bay, the Ukulites keep their community pure, and their existence peaceful.

Without any doubt, the Ukulite community is a patriarchal community from its very roots. Avidly following the Biblical principles regarding the behavior of men and women, they blindly follow prophet Jonas Ukulore wherever he may lead. Even when they stop following him, and they allow him to be killed, they do not admit it to themselves, and instead they build a statue in order to create the illusion that his martyrdom made their belief stronger. Of course, they blame the murder on an "outsider", as it is impossible for such aberrant thoughts to exist within their own people. However, the statue is nothing but a symbol that underlines the void at the Ukulites' hearts, and their hypocritical behavior.

The Ukulite community is organized on patriarchal principles. As a consequence, people divide their duties according to their gender. The women, obedient and silent, are concerned with domestic affairs, taking care of the household, cleaning, cooking, and providing comfort for their men and children. The men are working the cane fields or taking care of the trade business. They can also be leaders or preachers, and they are the ones in charge of protecting the village from any harm. Hence, they are the only ones allowed to venture past the valley limits, in order to keep harm at bay. In some instances, the Ukulite men wander as far as the swamp, when they search for the spooked horse and destroy Euchrid's lair, or when they hunt for Euchrid in order to punish him for having killed Beth. The women do not wander outside the town limits, they simply wait for their husbands' safe return home.

It is also important to point out that, as a general rule, the women who transgress their patriarchal role are more heavily punished than the men, who mostly manage to escape without any penalty. A suitable example here is Queenie, one of the three homeless people Euchrid encounters in his roaming. Although all three share the same shelter, and equally indulge in alcohol and sex, the cane workers only unleash their fury against Queenie and kill her. Moreover, as mentioned before, the Ukulites punish Cosey Mo severely for being a sexual worker, but do not mind the men from their community who visited her trailer.

Evidently, the Ukulite community requires of its women to be as pure as they can be. They do not allow them to interact with outsider elements which may corrupt them and leave the men to deal with such disturbances. The behavior of the community regarding Beth's raising is illustrative of how overprotective the villagers get over their women and girls. Left in front of Jonas Ukulore's statue by an unknown person (we know from Euchrid it was Cosey Mo), the child is seen by the community as a gift from God, and quickly becomes a symbol of their bravery during

the three years of rain. The fact that the child mysteriously appears in the town's center, near Sardus Swift's home, is taken by the Ukulites' as a sign of God's grace, who gives them one more chance to redeem themselves through this child. As such, the Ukulites' do not question the child's parents, sure that she was a gift from the skies, and possibly their future prophet.

Accordingly, the Ukulites seize the opportunity and use Beth as a way for them to wash their own sins. It does not matter how sinful and vengeful they are, as long as Beth stays innocent. Although at first Beth was supposed to provide Sardus Swift with an opportunity to atone for his wife's death, soon Beth's upbringing becomes an issue which concerns the entire community, as the narrator notes:

> Beth's well-being was the most important factor in the Ukulites' lives, and as the tending of the little girl was women's work, Sardus watched his child drift further and further from his sphere of influence. In fact, the entire Ukulite sect, whether they realized it or not, was fast becoming an out and out gynecocracy, controlled by a gaggle of superstitious, gossip-guttling crones, spinsters and widows (Cave e-book).

The ones who are mainly in charge of raising the child are the women, while the men ensure her protection. The villagers would organize meetings in which they discuss her upbringing, as well as ways to prepare her for meeting her higher purpose which is to become Jesus' wife. Specifically, the villagers are raising her to become the perfect Christian wife. However, the fact that the Ukulites are unknowingly praising the prostitute's daughter is another instance in which the narrator highlights their hypocrisy and duplicity.

Moreover, the text subverts the villagers' overprotective patriarchal attitude by emphasizing Beth's unhappiness. The young girl undergoes terrors which result in a behavior that is described by the narrator as quiet and sober. Her entire childhood is marked by the constant surveillance of the villagers, leaving her with no personal freedom whatsoever. Moreover, as it was the case with Jonas Ukulore, the villagers care more about the illusion of righteousness than righteousness itself. In one of the most wicked scenes from the novel, the old women who are responsible for Beth's upbringing require a written proof of Beth's virginity from an authorized outsider. Thus, they invite a nurse from the near-by village to check the girl up. As expected, the girl is a virgin.

However, the way in which the women react when they find out the news is illustrative of their immoral and heinous conduct. Satisfied by the result, Mrs Eldridge "held the medical certificate in her arthritic claws like a sea-bird with a scrap of beach trash" (Cave e-book), as if Beth's purity is absolving the whole village of their impurity. The grotesque manner in which the old woman is described is enhanced by the fact that none of the women care about Beth's feelings, who is crying next to them. Accordingly, Beth is objectified time and time again by the community and treated like a trophy or a relic rather than an actual human being. She realizes that they do not care about her and her feelings, but only about her ability to provide them with the illusion of innocence.

As a result, Beth is constantly alone or surrounded by adults who do not understand her. When she grows older, and is ready to go to school, she finds it difficult to adjust to the new environment. As the narrator points out,

> Beth was afraid of the other children. Having spent her early years smothered beneath a scrum of fussing mothers, she had never known the companionship of other children, and when Sardus Swift entered his daughter at Ukulore Valley School, fears that had previously lain hidden became manifest in the child. Beth was simply unable to feel at ease with children of her own age (Cave e-book).

Unable to attend school, Beth's loneliness deepens. Homeschooled by a stiff Mr. Henry Mendleson, who is more concerned with suiting the villagers' expectations than actually being a good teacher for Beth, the girl feels more and more secluded as time passes. Moreover, the constant surveillance, as well as the lack of any friends, contribute to her growing unhappiness.

Slowly but surely, Beth becomes what feminist critics have called the "madwoman in the attic". Having her life strictly controlled by others, and unable to make any choices for herself, the young girl starts to believe the old women's stories. She is certain that her main purpose in life is to become Jesus' wife, and that is the only thing which brings her joy. However, contrary to the villagers' expectations, she becomes convinced that Euchrid is Jesus. Euchrid, who got in the habit of watching her from her window every evening, is a perfect match for the paintings of Jesus that Beth has been surrounded by, due to his long hair, skinny figure, and blue eyes. Moreover, the villagers' conduct when they see Euchrid, who is chased away with stones, strengthens her belief that he is her savior. Analogous to the New Testament, she thinks that Euchrid is the prosecuted

Jesus who is driven away by those who do not see him for who he really is. Therefore, Euchrid becomes her only friend, and she tries to protect from the harmful intentions of the villagers: she constantly lies for him, hides him in her room, or offers him gifts and prayers on the windowsill.

By seeing Euchrid in secret, Beth rebels against authority, and against the patriarchal family as a whole. The more the community tries to restrict her access to Euchrid, the more she goes searching for him. She offers him personal belongings, such as some of her blonde hair locks or perfumed handwritten letters in which she tells him how much she loves him. Furthermore, she plants in Euchrid's mind the idea that he is a prophet, as she constantly encourages him to do something, repeating to him that she is "ready". Her rebellion reaches the climax when she invites Euchrid in her room and loses her virginity. Defying the villagers' restrictions, this is the only moment in the novel when she experiences complete freedom and takes the ownership of her body back from the Ukulites.

As some of the women are aware of Euchrid's visitations, Beth knows that after losing her virginity there is no more salvation for her in the eyes of the Ukulites. Yet, the moment of her demise seems to be more peaceful than her entire life, as she tells Euchrid, who is holding a sickle above his head, ready to strike: "At last, Jesus, you have come" (Cave e-book). Although some critics point out to the dark humor presented in the ambiguity of this line, arguing that this phrase refers to the completion of the sexual act (see Sarah Wishart, ""Nick Cave: The Spirit of the Duende and the Sound of the Rent Heart"), it is clear that Beth is now more at peace with herself than she has been in the whole novel. As opposed to Euchrid, who suffers a slow death, Beth's is supposed to be painless and fast.

Overall, death is the only way in which she can truly free herself from the villagers' grasp Even though the older women agree to lie about Beth's virginity, the girl prefers to die rather than be their doll again. However, it is debatable whether her death was slow and unpainful, since in the Epilogue we find out that she survived long enough to give birth to a child. Still, it can still be argued that Beth's story is illustrative of the damage patriarchy can do to girls, who are unable to express themselves and truly have a voice. Having the last word regarding her life represents an empowering act, allowing her to punish the Ukulite community by taking away what they consider to be their most valuable asset: their illusion of righteousness.

b) Other Families, Other Issues

As we have already discussed Beth's upbringing and the way in which she challenges patriarchal values, the next section will focus on individual families presented in the novel. Hence, we will point out that all these families subvert the idealized versions of traditional families, emphasizing once more the discrepancy between reality and illusion. Firstly, we will look at the Swift family, as they represent a more traditional type of family than the others presented in the novel. Then, we will move on to examine more in detail Cosey Mo's lifestyle and the way it is regarded as a threat to the well-being of the traditional nuclear family. We are also going to look at Kike, Queenie, and Abie Poe, and discuss polygamy and the way the existence of such a type of relation scandalizes the village. Finally, the largest portion of this section will be devoted to Euchrid's family, which is not only dysfunctional, but marked by a terrible curse, as common in gothic texts.

- **Rebecca and Sardus Swift**

Rebecca and Sardus Swift seem to live the perfect life. As epitomes of the virtuous young couple, the two seem to serve as role models for everybody in the village. Sardus Swift is the leader of the community, and he is praised and respected by all its members. His wife, Rebecca, is equally loved by the villagers for her kindness. The fact that they inhabit the house which is the closest to the village's center is yet another sign of their noble and honest behavior. Moreover, the two seem to genuinely love and care for each other, as opposed to the rest of the members of the community, who are mostly concerned with gossip and an ardent desire to appear as someone they are not.

However, such a perfect family cannot exist for too long in a gothic text. Similarly to the way in which the social customs burden Beth, they have a harmful effect on Rebecca and her marriage as well. Upon receiving the news that she is unable to bear children, the narrator says that Rebecca becomes "slave to a crushing melancholia that plundered at will her frail person" (Cave e-book). Feeling as if she had failed her womanly purpose, Rebecca struggles to find any other purpose in life. As a consequence, she feels empty and useless. Contrary to the other

members of the community, who do not seem to mind pretending to be righteous, Rebecca cannot live telling herself that she is still a woman, when she thinks she is not.

Her husband, Sardus Swift, is equally troubled by this development. Although it does not affect him personally as much, seeing his wife suffer has a devastating effect on him. As such, Sardus

> paid agonized witness to his beloved's slow but steady estrangement, seeing himself in his long-practised, self-abasing mind's eye as an odious mockery of manhood—a wretched travesty, cuckolded by an incubus, by a circus of blue devil (Cave e-book).

His inability to protect his wife and care for her is a direct reflection of his failed masculinity. Although he does not kill himself yet (he will do it later, after Beth's supposed death), his suicide is a social one. After Rebecca takes her life, Sardus is unable to return to return to his daily chores, and gives up his leading position in the community. He secludes himself in the house, refusing to take part in any activities.

Therefore, the Swift's family story illustrates once again the destructive effects the pressure to fit in has on individuals. The Swifts cannot go on knowing that they failed their holy purpose. Moreover, this occurrence shows the frail structure of the traditional family, which is more concerned with being in line than being truly happy. Rebecca's suicide also foreshadows the future misfortunes which are bound to happen in the valley. Beth, who was supposed to replace Rebecca in Sardus' life, will also end up following in what would be her step-mother's footsteps: she chooses death over being something she is not.

- **Cosey Mo**

Cosey Mo is another character who is punished for refusing to follow the social rules and blend in. "The harlot" on Hooper Hill, as she is referred to by the other characters in the novel, has no issues openly admitting that she is not interested in marrying or reproducing. She seems satisfied with her outsider status, and, unlike Euchrid, she has no curiosity regarding the Ukulites. She does not hate them, but neither does she try to fit in. Ergo, she understands that them and her are on two different planes between which there cannot be any reconciliation. However, the visible

satisfaction with her lifestyle is what enrages the Ukulites, both the men who visited her, and the women, who see in her the embodiment of a demon and decide to punish her.

Introduced to the readers when she is 26 years old, Cosey Mo is described as the most beautiful woman on the planet by Euchrid. Her pink caravan, on top on Hooper Hill, seems to be a site of pleasures for all senses: the caravan is filled with pleasant smells emanating from perfumes or oils, or creams, as well as items which satisfy the visual sense such as make-up, or lace clothing. Euchrid is mesmerized by the multitude of self-care products which set her apart from the rest of the villagers, who are either dirty from all the field work, or they do not care about their physical appearance (the women). It is important to underline that, although she lives outside the valley, surrounded by outcasts, Cosey Mo is actually the only person in the novel who seems at peace with herself.

Cosey is not only concerned with her own well-being; she helps the others too. One of her most important features is her empathy. She is not cruel, like the rest of the villagers and, although she is a sexual worker, she has more regard for others' lives than any of the other characters. She does not mind Euchrid's voyeuristic tendencies, who often sneaks up in the tall grass to watch her entertain her customers. Moreover, she saves Euchrid's life when one of the cane workers, who spots the boy hidden behind the trailer, beats him. Not only that, but she looks after Euchrid's wounds afterwards as well, and makes sure that he is feeling well. Apart from Beth, she is the only person in the valley who has ever showed Euchrid any form of kindness.

In general, Cosey Mo lives a peaceful life at the edge of the cane fields, minding her own business. Her peace is disturbed by the villagers, who, fed up with the rain, are on a crusade to eliminate all evil from their valley, convinced that this will ease God's anger and will bring back the cloudless skies. Hence, led by preacher Abie Poe, the villagers burst into her trailer in an attempt to "cleanse" her: they beat her, throw stones at her, take out her teeth, cut her hair, and burn the pink trailer down altogether. Such acts of violence are means to restore order into the gothic text, as Fred Bottling argues that

> the terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and property: transgression, by crossing the social and the aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits (Bottling 5).

Thus, by eliminating Cosey Mo, the villagers hope to restore the village to its former glory. That does not happen, however, and the rain keeps on pouring. Cosey Mo's almost lifeless body is taken away by the village doctor, while the rest of the Ukulites show no remorse for what they have done. They feel entitled to such acts of cruelty and believe that they only fulfilled God's wish. The only one who is devastated by the experience is Abie Poe, the preacher, who considers himself guilty for the harlot's untimely death.

Cosey Mo is described by Euchrid as extraordinarily beautiful, resembling an unearthly goddess who floats over the trash and the dirt covering the valley. Her skin is almost translucent, as Euchrid notes:

> The skin of her arms was faultless, save for where she stuck in needles, to wilt those brittle bones and make her limbs hang weakly, to make her heavenly body rock, to an fro, inside her shivering silk skin (Cave e-book).

The needle marks, scars left by drug use, contribute to her ethereal presence. Accordingly, she seems to live in a constant dream state, and her fragile body is capable of disintegrating at a simple touch. While Euchrid sees her frailty and seeks to protect her, the villagers fail to recognize any of these features, and in their eyes she is simply the embodiment of sin.

During the impromptu trial, held in front of the pink caravan, Cosey's distinguished behavior furthermore infuriates the villagers. She does not beg for forgiveness and neither does she show fear at the possible punishment, but rather she points out all the men who have visited her trailer. Insinuating that their husbands are as sinful as she is only makes things worse, causing both men and women to furiously attack her. Hence, the Ukulites do not allow her to defend herself, convinced that they are the only ones in charge of righteousness. By the end of the trial, Cosey Mo is left completely dehumanized, a walking corpse, stripped of all her beauty and power. Once again, the way in which they treat Cosey Mo, reveals the hideous true nature of the Ukulites. Their entire morality is a fraud, based on surface piety and hypocrisy.

- **Kike, Queenie, and Abie Poe**

Another type of family which does not fit the traditional Christian family pattern is the one resulting from the ambiguous relation between Kike, Abie Poe, and Queenie. The three "hobos",

as they are referred to in the novel, like Cosey Mo, lead a peaceful existence at the edge of the valley, finding shelter in an old abandoned church. They do not intervene in the life of the Ukulites and mind their own business. However, although they do not interfere with the Ukulites, who are seen as the authorities of the valley, they take advantage of those whom they perceive as weaker, such as Euchrid. Accordingly, their immortal behavior is not going to draw upon them the wrath of the villagers, but that of Euchrid, who now perceives himself as the uncrowned king of the valley and God's messenger and punisher in matters regarding righteousness.

The three hobos spend most of their time drinking and quarreling in the old church. Although they are not blood related, as argued above, Kike and Poe often refer to each other as brothers. Queenie is a described as a woman who "didn't say much, but she liked to laugh very loud and then listen to the laughter come bouncing back" (Cave e-book). She offers sex for alcohol, and Abie Poe and Kike take turns "fornicating with her" (Cave e-book). As such, like Cosey Mo, Queenie does not fit the requirements for the compliant traditional Christian woman, and she is punished for it. However, opposed to Cosey Mo, who is beautiful and gracious, she is loud, rude and obscene.

Although Queenie only minds her own business, her conduct is perceived as outrageous by the outsiders. Therefore, like the harlot of Hooper Hill, she will be punished violently for her endeavor, more than the two men she is with. Part of an elaborate plan of Euchrid's to take his revenge on Kike, about which we are going to speak more later on, Queenie is raped, mutilated, and then killed at the hands of the cane workers. Poe, the failed preacher, is killed by Kike, who suspects him of having instigated the cane workers, while Kike gets poisoned by Euchrid. Thus, the three hobos' fate shows once again that the trespassing of borders is heavily punished in the traditional community.

- **The Eucrows**

The last family we are going to analyze in this section are the Eucrows. Without doubt, Euchrid's family is the most representative gothic family in the entire novel. It has three members Ezra, the father, Jane, the mother, and Euchrid, their son, to whom we can add the donkey. Filled with predestination, family curses, and what Ezra calls "cursed blood" (Cave e-book), Euchrid's family tree seems like a long list of unnatural sins and transgressions.

Euchrid's father, Ezra Morton was born in the "thick hills of Black Morton Range", as the narrator reveals (Cave e-book). The fictional name of the mountain range already indicates that something wicked happened there, something which was covered by the "thick hills" and hidden in between the trees. The secret is unveiled by the narrator, who proceeds to describe the curse that marked the Morton family for decades, a curse which Ezra tried to leave behind, when he ran away from home, but which appears to be reborn with Euchrid.

Hence, the Black Morton Range got its name after Ezra's brother, Toad, who disturbed the natural order of things when he went on a killing rampage, murdering travelers and then taking them to a near-by cave to eat them. Described by the narrator as a "low-minded, wart-worried giant" (Cave e-book), Toad makes himself guilty of crimes against the nature, and as a consequence he is chased away by his family: "Toad had been driven from the Morton clan by his own kin, after they had found the family hog dead in its pen, covered in flies and human teeth marks —its back leg had been bitten clean off" (Cave e-book). As such, Toad's actions scandalize the entire region, and a search party is organized to search for him. They finally find Toad in a cave, feasting on a recent body. He is killed on spot, but his story is about to mark that land forever. The legend of the Black Morton, the "sore Goliath shunned by his own blood, without friend or companion" (Cave e-book) will remain deep inside Ezra's mind.

Although Toad is rejected by his family, their blood bond has a devastating effect on the entire family, and all of the nine members of the Morton family are hunted and shot on spot. As a consequence, most of them have to flee in order to save their life. Ezra is the only one who survives, and when Jane Crowley finds him, he is half dead. Ezra also changes his name from Morton to Eucrow, referencing once again the black bird which is a staple symbol for gothic narratives. Thus, the new family name indicates what the narrator points out, that Ezra's "family tree was as twisted and tangled as the briars that tortured the hills. Eye-blinding headaches, catatonia, seizures, trances and frequent outbursts of violence were the order of the day" (Cave e-book).

It is important to underline that Ezra does not only leave his birthplace in order to save his life, but his departure is also a way for him to distance himself from the past. However, as Catherine Spooner points out, in gothic texts "the past is a site of terror, of an injustice that must be resolved, an evil that must be exorcised" (Spooner 18). Accordingly, the past follows Ezra wherever he goes, and no matter how much he tries to keep evil at bay by reading the Bible and reciting psalms, those are just ways to postpone what is meant to happen. Hiding under a new

name in the valley, marrying Crow Jane, Ezra's uneventful daily routine makes it look as if he had let the past go. Nonetheless, it could be argued that, because of Ezra's isolation and the lack of people around, evil finds no way to manifest itself. The two other family members, about which we are going to discuss more in the following paragraphs, are even more troubled than him, and only the animals, which he traps and tortures, are left to endure his violent Morton tendencies.

Jane Crowley, Euchrid's mother, has an equally troubling past, marked by tragedy and wrongdoings. Although we are not given too many details about her family, we know that her parents did not have a good reputation in town. She got married in 1913, to an "honest" cane worker who took his own life a few days after the wedding, in what remained known as "the shotgun wedding" (Cave e-book). It is unclear why the cane worker decided to commit suicide, but the narrator hints that the wedding was not his decision, and he chose death over a life with Jane and her family. However, the young woman is not told about her husband's death, so for the next twelve years she waits for him to come, drinking herself into oblivion on the front porch. Consequently, her encounter with Ezra is not by accident: she was waiting for someone, while he was searching for a new home. When she sees him, she immediately assumes he is her lost husband, who finally returned home: "Ah waited twelve years but ah knew ya'd come on back", says the widow when she sees the wounded man (Cave e-book). Thus, the two of them, joined by sin, live intoxicated in order to try to forget their pasts.

Obsession with the past is one of the main features of gothic narratives, and in Euchrid family we see both his parents trying to avoid it. Jane drinks in order to forget her failed marriage, and, in time, she falls prey to alcoholism. Ezra, on the other hand, although he does not drink, becomes obsessed with traps and building card castles. As opposed to Jane, who is constantly screaming and getting in the way of others, Ezra seems rather quiet. His unusual hobbies, in particular castle card building, which requires a lot of concentration and time, are ways in which he keeps himself busy, while also distancing himself from the rest of the world.

Euchrid's birth, which is the result of their marriage does not bring any happiness to the family. Not only is the mother drunk when she gives birth, but Euchrid is also left unattended for the next hours after his birth. Both his parents see him as an embodiment of their sins and treat the boy with enmity and disgust. Hence, Euchrid grows up alone, isolated from both his parents and other children his age. Mute, ugly, and feeble, Euchrid is seen as a punishment rather than a source of joy by his parents. As the boy grows older, his parents get more and more dissatisfied with him.

Ezra becomes increasingly afraid that Euchrid will take over his long-gone brother traits and kills himself before he can witness the transformation.

Thus, the Eucrow family is illustrative for the gothic genre, underlining themes such as the recurring past, the cursed bloodline, or the dysfunctional relation between family members. It also shows that no matter how much the parents try to run away from their history, in gothic texts evil is passed down hereditarily. The following section is going to look in more detail at the Eucrows, as we analyze the relation between the family and the space they inhabit.

c) Gothic Houses and Gothic Curses

If gothic stories are about families, they are also about the houses in which they live. Gothic houses are full of mystery, of curses, and they often appear to be haunted. The shack in which Euchrid and his family lives corresponds to their status in the valley. Their shack, resting on a "junk heap" (Cave e-book), as far away from the village as possible, is surrounded by actual garbage, in the same way as those inhabiting it are considered useless members of the society, or even parasites.

Ezra's and Jane's house has never been a happy house, as the two inhabitants shared it not out of love, but as a way to dissolve their past into it. The birth of the child did not bring much happiness either, and Euchrid's birth is not regarded as a joyful occasion. As argued above, the two parents did not offer the newborn a warm welcome, but seemed to forget about him, as Euchrid does not receive any attention for one full day and must feed on newspapers. Moreover, growing up, Euchrid does not experience any acts of kindness from his parents: while his father mostly avoids him, or makes him work the land, his mother constantly beats him or chases him away. He is nothing but an animal in her eyes, and Euchrid develops an avid hatred for her. His descriptions of her are often brutal, the boy often comparing his mother to animals or mythological monsters:

> Mummy was a swine—a scum-cunted, likkered-up, brain-sick swine. She was lazy and slothful and dirty and belligerent and altogether evil. Ma was a soak—a drunk—a piss-eyed hell-bag with a taste for the homebrew (Cave e-book)

Hence, the violent language Euchrid uses to describe his mother, is accompanied by the day to day violence he has to endure.

Violence is also a tool which keeps the hierarchical distribution in the house functioning. If most of the other families in the novel are patriarchal, Euchrid's family is matriarchal, with Crow Jane ordering her husband and son around. Compared to a tyrant, Euchrid perceives her as a threat in the way of him developing a healthy relationship with his father. However, as long as Jane is around, Ezra's and Euchrid's violent impulses are kept under control. They direct all their hatred towards her, but she remains immune because of her alcohol addiction, which makes her blind to what is happening around her. Like two obedient dogs, the father and son are locked in their routines by the implacable master of the house.

The moment Jane is killed, after an argument with her husband, there is nothing putting a barrier between Ezra and his son. Euchrid describes the following two weeks as peaceful, a time in which he bonded with his father, and his father even attempted to explain himself to him. However, as time passes, Ezra seems to become more and more detached and thoughtful. The reason for his distancing seems to be the realization that his family's curse has caught up with him. As the narrator points out, "The question of heredity weighed heavily upon the God-fearing Ezra" (Cave e-book).

Following Jane's murder, Ezra knows that there is nothing able to keep his cursed blood at bay, stopping him from becoming a true Morton. As Anne Williams notes, issues regarding descent and inheritance are common gothic issues, and she argues that

> Gothic narratives often conclude with a revelation of the "true heir." Convention also demands that this heir be unexpected, and yet, once revealed, unmistakably authentic and incontestable (Anne Williams 239).

The pattern identified by Anne Williams can also be traced in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, where the true heir, Euchrid, makes his way up in an environment which has always been opposed to him. The revelation that Euchrid is the Chosen One is unexpected, since for the first half of the novel, while his mother is still alive, he never seems interested enough to act, and is pleased only with watching and lurking in the shadows. Thus, the change happens once his parents die and he is free to follow his destiny.

Recognizing his son's transformation, and seeing in him features of his damned brother, Ezra decides to kill himself before witnessing his final metamorphosis. Some critics, such as Carol Hart, argue that Euchrid murdered his father (Hart 104). However, although Euchrid often complains about seizures, and moments of "Dead time" (about which we are going to discuss more in-depth later on), I believe there is not enough evidence in the text that would point to such an outcome. Nothing out of the ordinary happens in the morning when Euchrid discovers his father's corpse, except for Euchrid's bad conjunctivitis (which has happened many times before). Moreover, upon discovering his father's deceased body, Euchrid is genuinely surprised and he struggles to understand why his father would take his life, especially when the two were getting along so well. The only time when it is hinted that Euchrid may be the murderer is towards the end, when Ezra shows himself to Euchrid in a dream, and mocks him for doing "a little patricide"

(Cave e-book). Yet, I believe this is only a consequence of Euchrid'sfeeling he symbolically murdered his father, by letting him down and becoming what Ezra was most afraid of.

Euchrid's dream is an important moment in the novel, as it explains the vile curse which has taken over the family. The curse is explained through the figure of the father, who tells his son:

> Once there was a rottenness residing in our home. A malign evil that ah could feel spreading through our little house on the hill like a poison thing. It was not always there, y'unnerstand? There was a time when our home was a happy one and we were content, your Ma and me. The first time ah noticed the stench of this rottenness was in your mother, years ago. You were not born yet, in fact Ma was big with you and your brother. … The bigger your mother got with you two, the meaner, more bad-tempered and downright belligerent she became (Cave e-book).

Thus, the father blames his son for bringing the curse back into the house. Moreover, Euchrid is presented as the embodiment of evil. Even in the womb, Euchrid already had the power to disrupt the family's happiness, and his corruption affected his mother, who slided even more into alcoholism. The rest of the revelatory dream concerns Ezra's realization that Euchrid is pure evil. Hence, he explains to his son the reason behind his death. He claims that, although he appeared to be happy in the few weeks prior to his death, and even tried to form a stronger bond with his son,

> all the time, boy, ah had the feeling something was not quite right. All the time ah felt there was something not quite right in all this—something to do with evil-ness and madness and murder. Something to do with you (Cave e-book)

Ezra's realization coincides with his spending more time with Euchrid. If, during the time his wife was still alive, the two interacted only briefly, after she is gone the father finally gets the chance to really know his son. The more time he spends with him, the stronger his feeling of unrest becomes. Further on, he confesses that

> One morning ah woke up and ah knew the evil had returned. Ah could hear the weird hissing and snipping and bumping around coming from your room, and suddenly ah realized that the evilness had never left our home at all (Cave e-book).

Ezra acknowledges that the Black Morton curse has settled inside Euchrid and, through him, it has infected the entire home as well. As such, Ezra's decision to kill himself is the only way in which he can protect himself from the evil emanating from his son.

Carol Hart notes that the Eucrow's house is "not defined by a labyrinthine spatiality found in earlier gothic texts, but rather it is a rambling spatial enclosure that toward the end becomes a mere fragment of its original structure" (Hart 104). For Euchrid the child, the house is a place of mystery and secrets. The fact that he is not allowed in his parents' room turns it into a place of fascination and fear, as the young Euchrid is often wondering what might be hiding in there. After his parents die, Euchrid discovers an old trunk in their room, in which he will find the missing fragments which complete his Antichristic identity: captain Quickborn's jacket and the telescope. Although it is unclear why the trunk was in Ezra's possession, the room functions like a Pandora's box, unleashing Euchrid's decadent fantasies. Some of that room's secrets are going to remain uncovered, such as his mother's trunks and boxes, to be burnt by his father right after her death.

Later on, for Euchrid the adult, the house becomes a symbol of his past and powerless previous life. It reminds him of the moments when he used to obediently listen to his parents, and he did not have a voice in the house. Moreover, Euchrid finds it difficult to stay in the house, and feels as if he were constantly under the surveillance of his dead parents. He decides that he has changed, and the house needs to reflect that. Accordingly, he demolishes the old establishment, and instead he builds an edifice reminiscent of old gothic castles. Surrounded by a tall wall, both meant to protect and to hide him, Euchrid builds his throne on a turret at the center of his kingdom. From there, he can safely observe and judge the Ukulites, and akin to how God is watching from above, Euchrid watches over the Ukulore valley.

d) Abjection and Othering in the Gothic Novel

One of the most enduring features of gothic texts has been, as Fred Bottling argues, the fascination with "objects that are constructed as negative, immortal and fantastic" (Bottling 1). In other words, with what is perceived as the "other". According to Julia Kristeva, the "abject" is the most secluded form of otherness, as she argues that "what is abject … is radically excluded" (Kristeva 2). Henceforth, this section will analyze Euchrid's identification with abjection, as well as the villagers' reaction to abjection and otherness.

Euchrid's identification with the abject begins at the moment of his birth. Brought into this world by a drunkard mother, who did not bother to give him a name or any attention for the next days following his coming, Euchrid is surrounded by death. Placed in the shoe box entitled "#2", as his dead brother as already taken the number one, Euchrid waits for someone to welcome him. Scared, afraid, and hungry, he watches the flies buzzing above his brother's corpse. Even the fact that Euchrid is placed second in line, after a dead brother, seems to be a cruel joke, emphasizing and foreshadowing the sufferings and humiliations he will have to go through while alive.

The corpse, Julia Kristeva argues, is the most abject of all things (4), and interacting with it results in making a person question "the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricated itself, as alive, from that border" (3). Confronted with the utmost form of abjection as a newborn, Euchrid's fascination with dead objects, decaying matter, and bodily secretions increases throughout the novel. Throughout his childhood, Euchrid collects all sorts of useless objects, which he then carefully organizes in shoe boxes: cicada shells, cotton strips with which he dresses his wounds, his hair and nail clippings, as well as Cosey Mo's blonde hairlocks. Finding his brother's skeleton buried in the back yard, Euchrid adds it to his collection of rarities.

He stores these objects in an old Chevy he discovered in the swampland, a place which becomes his secret hideout, both protecting and hiding him from the rest of the world. Placed in the swampland, the center of all evil, as the Ukulites believe, Euchrid finds comfort in his little hideout, surrounded by his boxes. For Carol Hart,

> Euchrid's practice of collecting is intrinsically tied to the desire to impose some kind of order upon reigning chaos, his careful serializing of the collections is also tied to his desire to narrate himself into the world (Hart 102)

The collected objects become part of his identity, and by identifying with them, Euchrid accepts the fact that he is viewed as useless, as trash, or, simply put, as abject. If he is mute, lacking the ability to express himself through words, the objects serve as a way of introducing himself to the world.

It is important to underline that Euchrid only collects items which are similar to him and discarded by others, or which do not seem to serve any practical purpose. His ability to see beauty where others see trash, Sarah Wishart notes, sets him apart from the rest of the Ukulites (210). Illustrative of this point is the way in which Euchrid and the Ukulites see Cosey Mo from two completely different perspectives. Hence, as we have seen above, while Euchrid emphasizes the harlot's beautiful features, her hair, her frailty, her beautiful clothes and perfumes, the villagers see none of those and beat her to death: to them, Cosey Mo is the embodiment of sin. Witnessing the damage they do to Cosey, and their ability to destroy beauty, Euchrid reflects that "something that had been rooted deep in the hearts of these pious souls, that had shone through their eyes, had now vanished. … Gone was the God in them" (Cave e-book). Thus, Euchrid's ability to care for others makes him more likeable than any of the Ukulites.

Like the Black Morton curse, tenderness and empathy for the weak seem to have also been transmitted hereditarily from his father's side. Although his father is described as a man who enjoys torturing animals in traps or through other various machinations, like Euchrid, he cares for frail and helpless things. Ezra is not devoid of compassion, and Euchrid is impressed by the way in which he handles Cosey Mo's body after she dies. He says: "Ah had never seen Pa do anything with such tenderness and feeling as when he buried the harlot of Hooper's Hill" (Cave e-book). Tenderness seems to be one of the features which keeps, for the moment, Euchrid from transforming into the villain he is going to be by the end of the novel. His ability to care is visible not only in the way in which he retrieves Cosey Mo's personal belongings, or in the way in which he cares for his collection, but it is also reflected in other selfless actions, such as saving the wild dog from his father's trap, or rescuing and bandaging Kike.

However, most of Euchrid's selfless actions seem futile, as he is either punished or misunderstood by others. After rescuing and taking care of a three-legged dog that got caught in one of his father's traps, Euchrid releases him to the wilderness. By naming him Yellow Diamond, Euchrid empowers what would otherwise be considered trash. His feeling of accomplishment and usefulness, however, is not going to last long, as just a few days later, after releasing the dog,

Euchrid will witness its killing by some schoolchildren. The ugly creature had no right to live even in the eyes of those considered to be the most innocents of the Ukulites. This reveals that cruelty is part of the Ukulites' identity, and Euchrid passively witnesses it from a distance. Similarly, Euchrid's good intentions are dismissed when the homeless person he saves from death, Kike, takes advantage of him rather than properly thank him. He treats Euchrid like his own personal servant, and constantly blackmails him into bringing him alcohol and doing his errands.

Hence, being disillusioned time and time again and not feeling appreciated for his good deeds, Euchrid soon realizes that there is no point in trying to help. Moreover, seclusion does not help either, since, although he tries to avoid the others, they always find a way to disturb his silence. Although all of the above-mentioned instances are going to contribute to Euchrid's demise, and his transformation into a blood thirsty prophet, probably the most important one is the destruction of his sanctuary by the Ukulites. The passage in which the destruction of the old Chevy takes place is the only fragment in the novel which is narrated both from Euchrid's perspective and from the villagers'.

For Euchrid, the destruction of his sanctuary is a violation of his entire persona. The old Chevy stored everything that was important to him, all the things that he loved, and nurtured. As he reaches the swamp, and sees that everything he ever had is gone, he describes the experience as follows: "Mah brains roared and bit by bit ah absorbed the horror of it all" (Cave e-book) or "Ah lay down because ah could no longer stand, and ah closed mah eyes on all the ivy and vine and ah opened mah mouth wide, in utter desolation" (Cave e-book). The objects in the Chevy are not simple possessions, but parts of himself, and Euchrid complains about the villagers having taken his soul away:

> all that was ah – … gone. Mah fucken home, mah very bones – gone. In that wanton violation of mah self, these vandals of the soul had taken with them mah very past – mah history – and left, in its place, a shadow. A shell. (Cave e-book)

The shocking realization that everything he ever was is gone triggers his hatred for the Ukulites. With nothing left to lose, Euchrid embarks on a journey to take revenge, and destroy the thing that the Ukulites hold dearest – Beth, the saint child.

The villagers, however, seem rather detached as they burn Euchrid's belongings. Led to the swamp by a spooked horse, the Ukulites are repulsed by what they discover, and they immediately categorize what they see as an abomination. They do not recognize the sentimental and symbolical value of the items, and immediately discard them as trash. What they discover seems "a strange one-man shelter, more like an animal's lair or a thief's hideaway filled with booty" (Cave e-book), as

> Bloody bandages had been threaded through the walls and a selection of tools had been hung from little looped strings inside: a hammer, a huge pair of scissors, a fretsaw, a screwdriver or two, some knives, nails, syringes. Hanging on little strings from the ceiling were seven or eight bird wings. From a stack in the corner, one of the men kicked over a shoebox and fifteen or so bird-skulls rolled out, glowing yellow in the torch light (Cave e-book).

The miraculous and the magic is gone from this description, and the inanimate objects appear to be the embodiment of a deranged mind. "Jesus Christ. This is hobo ground", said one of the Ukulites, while the other harshly concluded "Goddamn animals" (Cave e-book). Subsequently, villagers cannot understand and do not want to understand their discovery. They judge everything from their perspective, without regard to others.

According to Julia Kristeva, the instability of the border is what causes abjection, and in *An Essay on Abjection* she argues that it is not

> the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. (Kristeva 4)

Euchrid's sanctuary, situated at the heart of the swampland, is disturbing because it transgresses the border between human and non-human: located outside the accepted land (the village and the near-by cane fields), and lacking any sort of visible rationale in their eyes, the Ukulites quickly dispose of it, calling it an aberration. However, it is important to note that, at this instant, it is not Euchrid who is trespassing the border, but the villagers who step outside their inhabitable space. They decide to destroy what they do not understand, which is different from the way in which Euchrid interacts with the villagers and their belongings. Up to this point, he has done nothing to

damage the Ukulites' lifestyle, and he generally hid behind houses in order to simply observe the community.

In the eyes of the villagers, Euchrid represents abjection. His inability to talk contributes to his being viewed like an animal, rather than an actual human being. He is not allowed in the village, and whenever he is spotted, the people chase him away. His deformed body, excessive thinness, hunchback, and wounded limbs (a result of self-mutilation) appear grotesque to the villagers. Thus, trough Euchrid, the novel emphasizes what Catherine Spooner argues is one of the fundamental characteristics of the gothic text: its preoccupation with "the construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or 'other'" (Spooner 8). By embodying "the other", Euchrid becomes the equivalent of the monster, or of the villain in the gothic text.

As he is tormented by past and heredity at home, chased away by the Ukulites in the village, the swampland represents the only place where he can find peace. Deep inside of it he feels accepted and taken care of, similarly to how Cosey Mo looked after him when he was wounded. The swampland is perceived by Euchrid as an extension of his self, and he declares that he has felt attracted by it since early childhood:

> Ah cannot, in all honesty, state the exact age ah was when ah first entered the swampland … . For it seems to me that ah had always been drawn to this grim and murky place where ordinary souls would not dare to venture (Cave e-book).

Accordingly, his attraction for the swampland coincides with his feelings of inadequacy and inability to fit in. He knows his place in the hierarchy and he is not interested in transgressing it. As long as Euchrid's den is hidden in the swampland, reserved only to him, the borders are fixed. When the villagers destroy his sanctuary, Euchrid is left without a home and, thus, he proceeds to destabilize the borders and get more involved in the Ukulites' affairs.

The old Chevy, in which Euchrid stores his precious collection, also contains what he calls "the triangle of divine inspiration" (Cave e-book), three sacred objects which have the power to keep his dark blood in place. Euchrid speaks fondly of these objects, that he considers his armor:

> the harlot, the child-saint and mah custodial angel. Inexorably bound together, this heavenly trio—the pink fabric of the harlot's nightdress beneath me, laid out like a skin—the image of the child-saint above me, drinking me with her bewitching eyes—and all about

> me, mah angel, mah divine visitation filling me with her being, inspiring me. Together they guided mah hand, this threesome, guided mah hand in the dark. All about me, like an invisible armor, they protected me from those who would destroy me—destroy mah spirit— whether they were the bloody-minded brutes who worked the cane, the hypocrites who lived in the town, or the booze-bitten bums in the church (Cave e-book).

Consequently, when these items get destroyed, Euchrid's hereditary curse is unleashed and Euchrid is finally able to become who he was predestined to become.

Euchrid's ultimate transformation, after he kills Beth, also represents his total identification with abjection. He is no longer the naïve observer who tries to stay out of the villagers' way, he has become the most destructive event in the entire history of the village. By killing Beth, he kills the Ukulites' hopes and fundamentally disturbs their hierarchy. It is important to note that Euchrid not only kills Beth, but, more importantly, he corrupts her, stealing her from the patronage of the villagers, and seducing her. Beth dies voluntarily, in love with Euchrid. Moreover, by corrupting Beth, Euchrid restores order in the village. Aware that she is the harlot's daughter, Euchrid reclaims the girl and puts her where she belongs: in the abject world.

A final point which can be made in relation to othering and rejection regards the ambivalence of Euchrid's muteness. Although Euchrid's inability to speak is perceived by outsiders as proof of his reduced mental capabilities and, consequently, they often equate him with a dumb animal, the fragments that he narrates in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* display an ardent need to express himself and his ideas. Paradoxical for his lack of speech is Euchrid's ample vocabulary, as he seems to be fighting his way through words in order to properly articulate his points. The way in which he narrates is similar to the way in which he collects discarded objects. Thus, he is also a collector of words and of identities.

The descriptions of himself which he provides in the chapters entitled "The Lamentation of Euchrid the Mute" are textbook descriptions of prosecuted heroes or villains in gothic texts. For example, in one of them, he argues that

> Ah am one luckless bastard. God knows. Dumber than a hat full of earholes. A vile thing. Unworthy. Worthless. O yes! Grotesque in form. Misshapen. Yes! Misshapen and vile of mind. O *hideous deed* (Cave e-book).

Such paragraphs point out to Euchrid's self-awareness and also his devotion to constructing his villainous identity. He seems to be giving a significant consideration to what critics have called the gothic's obsession with excess (Spooner 24), which is illustrated by Euchrid's fixation with providing synonyms, metaphors, or comparisons, all ultimately expressing the same point. Moreover, Euchrid reminds the reader of his deplorable condition every time he has the chance.

Overall, it can be argued that Euchrid is an unreliable narrator, who knowingly constructs his wretched and abject identity. The kingdom that he builds in the final part of the novel is also an illustration of his desire to express himself. Naming it "Doghead", Euchrid populates it with symbols and images which depict abjection and are able to provide the Ukulites or the readers with a sense of disquiet. He thoroughly describes the process through which God instructed him how to build his kingdom:

> He called me servant. He said "Servant make for Me a wall." He told me that they would come and that ah must keep them out. He said "Servant build it high, build it out of wood and wire." He told me to build it round. He said within would be mah kingdom and that ah would wear the crown. He told me to fill it with the faithful and make for it a name. AND AH TOOK A BONE—A SKULL—AND CALLED THE KINGDOM: DOGHEAD (Cave e-book).

As such, Euchrid positions himself at the top of the hierarchy of abjection. The name Doghead is significant not only because Euchrid's most loyal servants are the rabid dogs, but also because Dog is the reversed version of God. Euchrid often admits he enjoys word games, and this is illustrated in various instances throughout the novel. For example, when he finds an old photo of a ship, Euchrid rearranges the letters of the ship's name, "Natasha I", to "I am Satan" (Cave e-book). Moreover, he frequently rearranges words or events in order for them to match his prophecies. Nothing is a random occurrence in Euchrid's world, and neither is it so in gothic fiction.

However, Euchrid is nothing but a servant. The true lord of Doghead is God, who trusts Euchrid to fulfill all his demands. He writes:

> Unner command by Him—The Great Preserver and Righter of Wrongs. His many voices, sometimes whispered, sometimes shouted, spoke the most amazing things. Most amazing. Things mah head can barely contain. And things most terrible (Cave e-book).

Thus, after his parents die, his "cursed" blood is set free. His blackouts aggravate, and his delusions of grandeur take over. God talks to him more than before, and his visions intensify. Basically, Euchrid projects himself and his wants unto God. In this way, he does not have to take ownership or responsibility of anything he does.

His kingdom is the reverse of the village. If the hideout in the swampland was a place of preserving the memory of all the useless things, Doghead is a celebration of abjection. By contrast with the orderly organization of the old Chevy, with boxes upon boxes carefully labelled, Doghead seems a cacophony of useless objects thrown one on top of the other. The wall he builds contains all the nameless objects which used to be preserved in hidden boxes. Everything is on display now, and the villagers must deal with that. In Doghead, the villagers are "the others". All the objects which Euchrid struggled to hide in order to protect are now ready for battle. Hence, Doghead is a monument of empowerment and a glorification of uselessness. Even the way in which Euchrid describes himself now is empowering, as he says

> In the mirror, mah hair now long, ah looked like a fucken prince. A King. King Euchrid the First. Monarch of Doghead. Don't fuck with the King, brother. Don't fuck with the King. And then ah looked again to Heaven and again ah gave Him thanks (Cave e-book)

As king of the abject, Euchrid is on a mission to protect himself and his servants. Thus, as compared to the Old Chevy, which was passive and hidden, Doghead is constructed as both a bait and a trap for the villagers. Surrounded by snare traps and sharp pointed fences, Doghead is an invitation to war.

As Euchrid blurts "Don't fuck with the King", another reference to a godlike figure is made, this time to Elvis Presley, the king of Rock'n'Roll. Similar to David Bowie, Nick Cave voiced many times his admiration for Elvis, and the song *Tupelo,* which he released in 1984 and recounts Elvis' birth in mythological terms, is a proof of this (see Nathan Wiseman-Trowse's "Oedipus Wrecks: Cave and the Presley Myth"). There are many similarities between that song and the novel, the song having been released just a few years prior to the novel:

> And the black rain come down. Water water everywhere. Where no bird can fly no fish can swim. Where no bird can fly no fish can swim. No fish can swim. Until The King is born! Until The King is born! In Tupelo! Tupelo-o-o! Til The King is born in Tupelo! (Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, *Tupelo*).

Hence, "The Three Years of Malediction", which is how the three years of constant rain are called in the novel, are illustrated in the song too. The birth of the King is prophesized as the only one which can stop the rain, similar to how in the novel the rain is stopped by the birth of the holy girl, Beth.

Even clearer similarities between the song and the novel are made in lines such as the following, which basically summarize the plot of *And the Ass Saw the Angel*:

> In a clap-board shack with a roof of tin. Where the rain came down and leaked within. A young mother frozen on a concrete floor. With a bottle and a box and a cradle of straw. Tupelo-o-o! O Tupelo! With a bundle and a box and a cradle of straw.
>
> Well Saturday gives what Sunday steals. And a child is born on his brothers heels. Come Sunday morn the first-born dead. In a shoe-box tied with a ribbon of red. Tupelo-o-o! Hey Tupelo! In a shoe-box buried with a ribbon of red. (Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, *Tupelo*)

As such, *Tupelo* outlines Euchrid's birth: born in a "clap-board shack", by a mother who fainted during the process because of alcohol, lying "frozen on a concrete floor", placed in a shoe box next to a dead brother. Euchrid's birth is remarkably similar to the way in which Nick Cave describes Elvis' birth. However, as Nathan Wiseman-Trowse asserts, in Nick Cave's *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, the dead brother is the one who lives: "Euchrid is not the 'good son', he is malevolent, deformed, a voyeur, mentally unstable, fundamental" (158). Accordingly, through these similarities, the narrator reveals that the true prophet which is about the be birthed by the valley is none other than Euchrid. What is more, this is Euchrid' s fate, that he cannot escape.

Consequently, Euchrid's identity seems divided between the dormant prophetic one, which, as argued before, comes to surface after his parents' death, and the obedient and fearful identity, which keeps him from harm's way and out of the Ukulites' business. Comparable to Robert Louis Stevenson's gothic tale, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the two personalities inside of Euchrid fight in order to gain control over the body. If young Euchrid tries

to suppress his dark side, towards the end of the novel he gives his dark side more and more space. What he calls periods of "Dead-time" are actually times in which Euchrid the King takes over, making Euchrid the Obedient forget. He describes these times as follows:

> These last two years, you know, have been hard time spent. Mah capacity for reminiscence— mah recall— well, these faculties, you know, once so sharp, so keen, have been—have been ruptured by yawning canyons of grey wool, like uncharted manholes down Memory Lane. Whole clues gone lost from the riddle. Days of fog. Of fear. Of blood and terrible laughter from the dark (Cave e-book).

Hence, following Ezra's and Jane's death, Euchrid spends all of his time in complete isolation, and, stepping into his mother's footsteps, he gives in to alcohol. Accordingly, in such moments, his other personality comes to surface and puts his plan in motion. Euchrid struggles to gain control, as he cries out: "Deadtime! Deadtime! Where do you go?! Who uses you, if not me?! The killers and the killed. Murdering of mah lifetime—mah living-time" (Cave e-book). Therefore, Euchrid's incomprehensible fascination for Beth, as well as God's voice which he starts hearing, are just ideas planted in his head by his other self, and ways in which he attempts to stay in control. Moreover, as hinted above, the "little patricide" (Cave e-book) could very well be part of his other personality's plan.

Euchrid's death, presented in the Prologue, provides the conclusion for Euchrid's struggle. As the narrator describes the grotesque scene, he points out to the all-knowing eye of the prophet:

> But stop. Wing! Wheel! Look who lies on the surface of the mud, all curled up like a newborn! See how his bones cleave to his skin. How his ribs fan softly each time he draws breath. See how he is nearly naked. And look how very still he is. But for that eye. It rolls in its orbit, and, fish-like, fixes us. We freeze and circle (Cave e-book).

Although Euchrid's body is almost lifeless, the Morton curse (embodied by the Prophet) seems to live on, looking for yet another body to possess. The narrator is left to wonder whether the child that is born in the Epilogue, which we know to be Euchrid's and Beth's, is going to carry this curse over to the next generation in the Ukulore valley.

2.4 Conclusion

Overall, this novel illustrates the gothic's obsession with borders and othering. The other is empowered by being allowed to present his/her own point of view. Hence, the community of the Ukulites, which is supposed to be the norm, appears to the reader as dysfunctional and wicked. In this way, patriarchal values and religious meta-narratives are also questioned. Those who are supposed to be wicked in the reader's eyes, such as the prostitute Cosey Mo or Euchrid, the mute, are presented with kindness and compassion, while the allegedly righteous characters, such as the Ukulites or Abie Poe the preacher, reveal themselves as the true villains. Moreover, Beth's journey from an obedient doll to a teenager capable of making her own choices can also be interpreted in a feminist fashion, as she subverts the villagers' expectations of her.

The novel also employs traditional gothic themes, such as the curse, the dysfunctional family, predestination, as well as the divided self. Euchrid's transformation into a blood thirsty prophet happens gradually, as a consequence of utter loneliness and repeated rejection. Thus, although the novel reinforces gothic motifs, such as that of the inescapable fate, it also points out the part the Ukulites' played in Euchrid's transformation and in his identification with abjection. Ultimately, the Dark Prophet is the villagers' creation, and this curse will keep on reappearing until the people learn how to accept it and admit the fact that sin and vice are a part of everyday life, just as righteousness is. In this manner, the novel reinforces Postmodern beliefs which question the dichotomy between good or evil, arguing that life is more complex than the traditional community envisions it.

3. *Murder Ballads* and the Southern Gothic

In this final section of the chapter, I will integrate Nick Cave's album *Murder Ballads* in the Southern gothic tradition, while also pointing out the Postmodern elements which make it subversive and empowering. As Nick Cave argued in various interviews, his interest in Southern writers started at an early age, and their influence stayed with him throughout his career. Moreover, he confessed in an e-mail that

> My interest in Flannery O'Connor and Willian Faulkner came straight out of reading the Bible, and had something to do with how they used language - they each seemed to have a very unique way of using highly-stylised English that seem to play with colloquial vernacular as a way of creating a new hyper-expressive language, that was often bizarre and unorthodox and full of meaning. Especially William Faulkner, whose books seemed so bold and brave, to me. And when I read Flannery O'Conner in my mid-twenties (same as you), her take on the world seemed so wonderfully nihilistic. (Nick Cave[1]).

Hence, religion, violence, and nihilism blend in Nick Cave's work in order to portray what Jason Friedman refers to as a decadent and morally ambiguous world (197). Accordingly, this section will look at some of the common characteristics that Nick Cave and Flannery O'Connor share. While this discussion can be extrapolated to most of the texts the two wrote, this chapter will only cover Nick Cave's album *Murder Ballads* and Flannery O'Connor's short story collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*.

Nick Cave's *Murder Ballads* was released in 1996 and, as the title suggests, the album is concerned with the tradition of the murder ballad. The murder ballad was part of the common 17th century European oral tradition, which later on became common in America as well. Evidently, the murder ballad tells the story of a homicide. It can make use of any narrative perspective, including the one of the murderer, as it presents the listener with details regarding a gruesome murder. Thus, the killer and his or her victims are introduced, as well as the method of murder, the reasons behind it, and the aftermath of the event - either whether the family takes revenge or not, or what the fate of the criminal is (prison, sentence to death, suicide etc).

[1] In June 2018 took place an exchange of e-mails between the author of this paper and Nick Cave, in which Nick Cave detailed his fascination for Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner, as well as his opinion regarding Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize. The e-mail exchange can be found in its entirety in the Appendix.

Out of the ten tracks included on the original album, nine are stories of murder, and the final track is a cover of Bob Dylan's *Death Is not the End*. Moreover, some of the songs on Nick Cave's album are reinterpretations of actual historical murder ballads. Such examples are *Henry Lee* for *Young Hunting*, *Stagger Lee*, depicting the story of Lee Shelton, or *Where the Wild Roses Grow*, which is inspired by *The Willow Garden*. The other murder ballads on the album, *Crow Jane*, *The Curse of Milhaven*, *Song of Joy*, *Lovely Creature*, *The Kindness of Strangers*, or *O'Malley's Bar* are Nick Cave's original creations.

As Nick Groom points out, one of the most poignant characteristics of the American murder ballad is its amorality (82). Accordingly, the ballad is simply an uninvolved and unemotional oral account of a murder. The murder is described as a fact of life, without any embellishments or supernatural elements, which are more common of European murder ballads. Moreover, these depictions tend to be more realistic, and they usually end with the murderer's imprisonment or death at the hands of the law or of the victim's family. Nick Cave's ballads, however, challenge this pattern, as out of the nine murderers who are presented in the album, only two are arrested, one is sent to the asylum, and none gets killed. Henceforth, the ballads have an open ending, allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions.

Traditionally a regional genre, Southern gothic uses the American South as a setting, focusing on small rural areas, in which the stability of the environment is threatened to be destroyed by some sort of a transgression. As Street and Crow note,

> the South is a region that has always been obsessed with crossroads and boundaries, whether territorial (the Mason-Dixon line) or those related to gender, social class, sexuality and particularly race (Street and Crow 2).

Thus, its obsession with borders leads to what Gary Ciuba calls a "siege mentality" (16), or a defensive stance in front of all the attacks which threaten to destabilize the Southern morals and way of living, which may come from "abolitionists, the Union Army, … civil rights agitators, the federal government, feminism, socialism, trade-unionism, Darwinism, Communism", and so on (Hackney 924-925). This results in a paranoid view of the world, which thrives on the constant fear that "the enemy might be everyone and everywhere" (Ciuba 16). Such a defensive posture is visible in Nick Cave's and Flannery O'Connor's texts too, where characters are often punished for leaving the comfort of their own home or the small town.

Like Flannery O'Connor, Nick Cave chose as setting for his murder ballads the American South. As we have argued above, when we discussed *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, Nick Cave's characters are obsessed by borders and hierarchies, and in *Murder Ballads* another border is added to the narrative: the geographical border. Hence, *Kindness of Strangers*, similar to *God Is in the House,* illustrates the discrepancy between the safety and comfort of home, and the outside world, which is perceived as dangerous and corrupted. He sings

> She'd grown up hungry, she'd grown up poor
> So she left her home in Arkansas
> O poor Mary Bellows
> She wanted to see the deep blue sea
> She drove across Tennessee
> ……..…
> Poor Mary thought that she might die
> When she saw the ocean for the first time
> O poor Mary Bellows (Nick Cave, *The Kindness of Strangers*).

Mary Bellow's tragic story and murder reveal the traditional concern with borders of gothic fiction: it is always better to stay where you are comfortable, rather than venture into the unknown. As long as the girl stayed poor and hungry in her small town in Arkansas, she was safe. Her demise came as a punishment, because she left her home and trusted strangers. Hence, Nick Cave's song ends with a warning, meant to keep young girls at home:

> So mothers keep your girls at home
> Don't let them journey out alone
> Tell them this world is full of danger
> And to shun the company of strangers (Nick Cave, *The Kindness of Strangers*)

In addition to pointing out the dangers of travelling, the song also reinforces patriarchal concepts regarding women, who should be obedient and know their place in the social hierarchy. However, by describing the gruesome way in which Mary Bellow's death occurs, Nick Cave clearly mocks such views, which tend to blame the victim rather than the aggressor.

The events depicted in Nick Cave's song, *The Kindness of Strangers*, are many times mirrored in Flannery O'Connor's short story collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. In her stories, those who venture past their town limits are often punished as well. In addition to the short story which bears the same title as the volume, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, in which we see an entire family killed by The Misfit as they attempt to make a journey from Georgia to Florida, other stories follow the same pattern. *The Artificial Nigger* illustrates the dangers of the city as experienced by a grandfather and his grandson, while *Good Country People* shows Joy Hopewell, who renames herself Hulga, being tricked by a stranger whom she considers harmless and ignorant, because he is from the countryside.

Flannery O'Connor's story, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* follows the same pattern of naïve characters who are deceived by apparently benevolent outsiders, similarly to Mary Bellow's story. In O'Connor's story, Mrs. Carter marries her deaf and mute daughter, Lucynell, off with Mr. Shiftlet, a stranger who manages to impress the mother after just a few days at the farm with his modest lifestyle and healthy life concepts. However, as soon as the newly married couple take off to their honeymoon, Mr. Shiftlet drops Lucynell at a random diner, and he drives off, keeping the car and the money Mrs. Carter offered them. Thus, time and time again, Flannery O'Connor's stories emphasize how traditional townspeople put their trust in strangers, just because they appear to be righteous. Yet, in the end, they are always betrayed, because righteousness seems easy to fake. This is underlined in Nick Cave's *And the Ass Saw the Angel* novel too, where the Ukulites are more interested in appearing righteous rather than actually being so. The malevolent and corrupting stranger is also a destructive force in Nick Cave's song, *Where the Wild Roses Grow*, underlining once again, like in *Kindness of Strangers*, the dangers to which young innocent girls subject themselves by trusting outsiders.

In both Nick Cave's and Flannery O'Connor's texts, the murderers or antagonists are almost always travelers or individuals who do not have a place they can call home. They either run away from something, like The Misfit in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, who runs away from the police, or they travel in search of opportunities to make easy money, like Mr. Shiftlet in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, or Manley Pointer in *Good Country People*, who take advantage of their naïve victims.

The narrator in Nick Cave's *Song of Joy* is yet another exemplification of the vile traveler, in addition to the other two – aforementioned - from the album. While running away from the

police, the murderer stops in every town and tries to impress strangers with a mournful story about his family:

> Have mercy on me, sir
> Allow me to impose on you
> I have no place to stay
> And my bones are cold right through
> I will tell you a story
> Of a man and his family
> And I swear that it is true (Nick Cave, *Song of Joy*).

The narrator proceeds to tell a story which is clearly a mix of truths and lies. He confesses that his family was killed and he is looking for the murderer. However, the undisclosed quotes from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which the narrator claims he is unfamiliar with, reveal the fact that he is actually the Red Right Hand murderer. Moreover, he reports that "they never caught the man" and "he's still on the loose", committing even more crimes, and then carries on explaining that he himself is a traveler:

> So I've left my home
> I drift from land to land
> I am upon your step and you are a family man
> Outside the vultures wheel
> The wolves howl, the serpents hiss
> And to extend this small favor, friend
> Would be the sum of earthly bliss
> Do you reckon me a friend?
> The sun to me is dark
> And silent as the moon
> Do you, sir, have a room?
> Are you beckoning me in? (Nick Cave, *Song of Joy*).

Hence, the narrator appeals to the listener's good nature, in hope that he will be invited in the house. As common in gothic texts, nature plays a big part in foreshadowing the gruesome events which are about to happen, once the malevolent stranger is admitted into the house.

The fascination with borders and transgression is not only common in Southern gothic fiction, it is one of the most frequent features encountered in Postmodernism. Thus, Flannery O'Connor's and Nick Cave's fiction is populated with outsiders: freaks, murderers, alcoholics, or mentally insane. Both authors seem to be fascinated by the extraordinary body, especially mutilated and weakened. Accordingly, in *A Temple of the Holy Ghost*, Flannery O'Connor introduces us to a "hermaphrodite" character, who will deeply mark one of the young girls, while, in many of the other short stories, we encounter characters who suffer from some sort of a retard – mental or physical. For example, in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* and *A Late Encounter with the Enemy*, the main characters have mental retard and are unable to understand what is happening to them, both acting like children. While Lucynell falls victim to Mr. Shiftlet, the old veteran is used as a trophy by his family and ends up dying on the stage during his great-granddaughter's graduation.

In addition to the mentally handicapped characters, in Flannery O'Connor's short story collection we also encounter protagonists with physical disabilities, such as Hulga in *Good Country People*, who has a wooden leg, or Ruby Hill in *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, who envisions her pregnancy as a deformity or a tumor. Nick Cave's characters in *Murder Ballads* are not necessarily abnormal from a physical point of view, but the bodily handicap will play a big role in his novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, as it was argued in the previous section. As we have seen, Euchrid's physical deformity contributes to his identification with abjection.

Social outcasts, however, are at the center of both Nick Cave's and Flannery O'Connor's texts: drunks, homeless people, or murderers. Illustrating the ways in which religion and violence are interconnected in the South, these texts abound in what may be considered gratuitous violence. Gary Ciuba argues that, historically, in the South, violence was not only tolerated by the church, but even encouraged, saying that

> violence and religion have supported each other in the South because the region's Christianity was too much like Christendom at large: it never completely renounced the divine wrath (Ciuba 39).

Hence, once again, Nick Cave's passion for the "rancorous God" (Nick Cave quoted in Alderton 170) of the Old Testament can be exploited, this time in a Southern setting. Frequently in Nick Cave's lyrics, the murderers defend their crimes using religious arguments. While admitting to her crimes, Loretta, in *The Curse of Millhaven*, keeps on repeating "All God's children, they all gotta die" (253). Similarly, the narrator from *O'Malley's Bar* engages in a theological investigation, as he sings "If I have no free will then how can I / Be morally culpable, I wonder" (Cave, *O'Malley's Bar*).

The South is presented in both Cave's and O'Connor's writings as a place which is deeply concerned with the relation between religion, righteousness, and sin. In Flannery O'Connor's writings, the South seems populated by sinners and people who are beyond salvation, unable to see the light and correct their ways. Like Nick Cave's characters in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, O'Connor's characters seem to repeat the same mistakes over and over again, stuck in a cycle of sin and depravity. She emphasizes the discrepancy between the Northern and the Southern reader, as she argues in one interview that "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic" ("Mystery and Manners" 40). Hence, the South Flannery O'Connor depicts in her stories is one in which the natural order of things has been disturbed by an outside element (most often the civilizing impact), to which the locals have a hard time adjusting. The aforementioned story *The Artificial Nigger*, is a clear example, as the grandfather seems lost and powerless in the labyrinthine big city, in which blacks and whites coexist, and the shops aggressively advertise their products.

For the most part, Flannery O'Connor's stories abound in violence, cruelty and grotesque imagery. Although not all of Nick Cave's murder ballads are certain to happen in the South (as some songs do not mention the setting), many of his characters display homophobic, misogynistic, or racist attitudes. However, as compared to Flannery O'Connor's stories, where the capital punishment is a consequence of their inability to recognize the light and correct their behavior, in Nick Cave's, violence does not seem to serve a certain purpose. As such, nobody escapes the violent wrath of the antagonists: men, women, children, and even animals fall prey. Entirely, in *the Murder Ballads* album we are presented with the deaths of 75 human beings and a dog, and each song introduces us to a different killer. Most songs are narrated from the perspective of the

murderer, and, in some, the readers get both the perspective of the murderer and that of the victim (the duets with Kylie Minogue *Where the Wild Roses Grow* and with PJ Harvey *Henry Lee*).

As a Catholic writer, Flannery O'Connor believes that suffering is the key to a true Christian life. Following the Biblical principle which says "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10), as well as the example of Jesus, who suffers for all of humanity's sins, Flannery O'Connor makes her characters suffer in order to get them closer to God. In addition to that, she also believes that people are flawed and that we have lost our connection with the spiritual world. She confesses that "My audiences are the people who think God is dead" ("The Habit of Being" 92), and thus, through her writings, she attempts to wake them up and to show them the right path. This may be one of the reasons violence appears so shocking and unexpected in her writings, where violence becomes a way to raise spiritual awareness. Pain is the only way through which her characters can save themselves and become true Christians.

Most often, the characters in her short story volume are sentenced to die terrible deaths, but right before that, they undergo a moment of epiphany, which equates their salvation. For example, right before being shot by The Misfit, the grandmother in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, welcomes God in her heart and forgives her murderer. This scene is presented in the short story as follows:

> She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reached out and touched him on the shoulder (O'Connor e-book).

Sometimes, as it happens in the short story entitled *Revelation,* the epiphany comes without requiring the blood sacrifice. Mary Grace's violent endeavor towards the protagonist is enough to make her think and admit her mistakes, acknowledge the fact that she is a sinner and she is not worthy of God's love. In other short stories, such as *Everything that Rises Must Converge* and *The Lame Shall Enter First*, it is not the death of the sinners that awakens them, but the death of someone close: Julien's mother in the first story, and Sheppard's son, in the second.

At the root of Southern violence, Ciuba argues, lies the hierarchical establishment which has ruled over the South since its beginnings (16-17). The plantation owner, male and white, was at the top of this hierarchy and he used violence to maintain his status quo. Ciuba argues that "the

elite seek to achieve the ideals of the hero" (19), similarly to the way in which medieval aristocracy worked, by imitating "an ideal past" (Huizinga 30). This mimetic tradition, which ultimately legitimizes the power in the hands of the white patriarch, is traced by Wilbur Joseph Cash back to the first few settlers in Virginia, who claimed to be descendants of English nobility (7-8). They served as models for the later aristocrats, who started imitating them, "so that every white-columned plantation, every piece of family silver, every sir and servant took its repeated place in a tradition of simulacra" (Ciuba 20).

Therefore, traditionally, the South seeks to be a place of clear borders, where everybody knows his/her place in the hierarchy. The plantation owner's image is mythologized, embodying the noble hero, the perfect human that "negroes, poor white, and middle classes" dream of becoming (Ciuba 21). Moreover, the value of the plantation owner is given by the others' recognition and his "self-worth [is] lived in the look of the other" (Ciuba 21). Consequently, doubles are not permitted in the South, and everybody needs to be aware of his/her rightful place in the social hierarchy. The duel serves as a tool to eliminate this threat and "reestablish the social division that had been undermined" by somebody else, claiming to be another person's equal (Ciuba 22).

Accordingly, dueling violence is seen as a way of protecting one's honor, while violent behaviors towards those who are lower in rank, such as women or black people, is a way of ensuring their social and symbolical death (Patterson 8-9). Orlando Patterson furthermore argues that, in addition to physical violence, cultural violence is used to destroy the individuality and self-worth of its victims: "because masters controlled such symbolic activities such as naming, dressing and worshipping, they violated the very identities of slavery by limiting their self-interpretation of signs" (8-9). However, later on, violence becomes a way of subverting the established order, and this is the reason Postmodern writers take interest in the genre. As we can see in Nick Cave's or Flannery O'Connor's writings, the hierarchy is reversed.

In Flannery O'Connor's short story collection, most stories portray women at the head of plantations, but they cannot maintain their status quo and end up losing their power to those even lower ranked than them. In *A Circle in the Fire*, Mrs. Cope, the owner of a farm in Georgia, cannot keep control over her possessions and, although she keeps on repeating to her three unwanted guests to leave, they rebel against her orders and set the farm on fire. As mentioned before, the same thing happens in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, where Mr. Shiftlet deceives Mrs.

Crater by pretending to help when, in fact, he steals the money, buys a car, then leaves Lucynell alone at the diner. Thus, the owners are often tricked by those inferior in rank to them.

Nick Cave's song, *Stagger Lee*, is another illustration of the way in which violence is used to subvert the traditional hierarchy. Cave's song is inspired by a real-life event, in which Lee Sheldon, an African-American pimp and gambler, shot Billy Lyons after a disagreement on the Christmas night of 1895, and left the bar showing no remorse, with a rather rediscovered sense of self-worth. In the song, Stagger Lee illustrate what Ayers defines as the legendary figure of the "bad black man", which he defines as "the moment that a negro steals, robs, or commits some other crime, his person seems to become sacred in the eyes of his race, and he is harbored, protected and deified" (Ayers 229). Stagger Lee commits a series of transgressive crimes throughout the song, which start with his killing the bartender, a presumably white man who refuses to show him respect. He then proceeds to flirt with a white prostitute, and fantasizes not only about killing Billy Dilly, his rival, but also raping and humiliating him. Thus, by committing all these violent acts, Stagger Lee sets himself as an equal rival for Billy Dilly and is empowered.

Oftentimes, in Nick Cave's songs, violence and religion are related. Although that is not the case in songs such as *Stagger Lee, Where the Wild Roses Grow, Song of Joy,* or *The Kindness of Strangers,* where the murderers have various reasons for killing, in songs such as *O'Malley's Bar* or *The Curse of Millhaven,* God is frequently invoked by the murderers. In these songs, the characters act as whips of God, and similarly to how Euchrid hears God's voice, which empowers him and orders him to kill Beth, the murderers in Cave's ballads are also guided by God's hand to meet their destiny. The murderers in *O' Malley's Bar and The Curse of Millhaven* seem, like this God, to enjoy killing others and take pleasure from the power this gives them as, as Linda Kouvaras states, "to kill equates with the godlike" (101).

Loretta, the youngest murderer on the album, constantly repeats in *The Curse of Millhaven* the line "All God's children they all gotta die" (Cave, *The Curse of Millhaven*). Hence, Loretta's lines illustrate Linda Kouvaras claim, as she believes that by killing she gets closer to God and aids him in his purpose. However, Loretta's lines seem rather arrogant, and her acts can be interpreted as rebellion against her parents. This idea is reinforced by the lines in which she blames her mother for having taught her that, such as "Mama always told me that we all gotta die" (Cave, *The Curse of Millhaven*). Thus, her killing spree is a way of subverting authority, in this case her

parents and God. By the end of the song, Loretta shows no sign of regret and when the police catch her she confesses:

> I was laughing when they took me away
> …….
> They ask me if I feel remorse and I answer, "Why of course!
> There is so much more I could have done if they'd let me! (Cave, *The Curse of Millhaven)*

Loretta's arrogant attitude can be perceived as empowering, as she stands by her decisions, rather than submit to the authorities.

In *O'Malley's Bar* the narrator displays a similar attitude, blasphemous and arrogant, in complete defiance of God. Like the Misfit in Flannery O'Connor's story, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, he is aware of his sinful nature and believes that he is "the man for which no God waits" (Cave, *O'Malley's Bar*). However, the act of killing comes to him as an almost supernatural demand, and he describes his hand's becoming self-aware and acting all by itself:

> My hand decided that the time was nigh
> And for a moment it slipped from view
> And when it returned, it fairly burned
> With confidence anew (Cave, *O'Malley's Bar*).

Further on, the character describes being able to view himself from the outside while committing the crimes, implying that he is under somebody's (God's) spell: "When I shot him, I was so handsome / It was the light, it was the angle" (Cave, *O'Malley's Bar*). Additionally, he even lets the others know that it is not actually him committing the crimes, thus attempting to somehow excuse his actions:

> "Neighbours!" I cried, "Friends!" I screamed
> I banged my fist upon the bar
> "I bear no grudge against you!" (Cave, *O'Malley's Bar*)

Not only does he apparently lose control over his body, but the faces of those around him seem to change as well. He, for example, does not recognize O'Malley's wife anymore, and sees her as a fish at the bottom of the ocean, looking ugly and vicious. The change of faces could mean

that the narrator has gained some sort of supernatural powers, which allow him to see the real faces of those around him and recognize their sinful nature. Nick Groom notices that "the killer [in O'Malley's Bar] is apparently engaged in a theological experiment investigating moral culpability and free will" (Groom 92). When somebody in the bar accuses him of being an evil person, he even states that: "If I have no free will then how can I / Be morally culpable, I wonder" (Cave, *O'Malley's Bar*). The narrator also makes numerous references to religion, especially to Virgin Mary and Saint Sebastian, which shows that he is familiar with the Bible, with both the New and the Old Testament. Thus, by committing all those acts of violence, he both questions and mocks religion, showing its absurdity. He argues that he cannot be made responsible since he, as any human being, is completely powerless.

4. Chapter Overview

Overall, this section has showed the gothic's potential to subvert hierarchies of power and challenge tradition. If Nick Cave's novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel,* empowers the marginal by conferring him with a voice and the ability to tell his own story, in *Murder Ballads* and Flannery O'Connor's short story collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* we are presented with a lawless world, in which established hierarchies are inverted. In Cave's world, violence is a mark of a nihilistic world, which has been abandoned by God. Accordingly, while Flannery O'Connor writes to wake up God's sleepy children, Nick Cave's characters are defying God and institute themselves as gods. Throughout the analysis, we have emphasized the gothic's obsession with borders and destabilizing hierarchies of power, which coincide with Postmodernism's interest in the construction of marginal and fragmented identities.

CONCLUSION

Although the distinction between high and popular culture has become increasingly irrelevant nowadays, the debates regarding the value of one artistic work or another still spark tremendous debates in the cultural world. The difference is that in Postmodernity, the authoritative voice of the critic as a taste legislator has been lost, and this has led to the creation of various hierarchies, or canons, each corresponding to a different social group. Undoubtedly, the *high versus low* distinction still exists, even today, but it is no longer generally acknowledged, and it differs according to the group which interprets the cultural good.

As the theoretical chapter has showed, throughout history there have been various reasons which determined the intellectuals to keep the fields of high and of popular culture distanced. Such reasons were, as in the cases of Alexis de Tocqueville or Ortega y Gasset, the fear that a democratic culture automatically lowers the quality of all cultural works, which ultimately leads to a single, mediocre culture. For the Frankfurt theorists, in particular Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, or Herbert Marcuse, art and politics must stay separated, since they believed that mixing the two fields is equivalent to allowing art to become a tool for extremist ideologies. Accordingly, they were convinced that popular culture can brainwash its audiences, leading to populist leaders' gathering more power.

Recently, however, Postmodernist critics have dismantled the old fears regarding the blending of the boundaries between the two fields. While they do agree that the disappearance of the critic as an authoritative figure over all cultural taste may allow for problematic ideologies to surface, it also allows for previously marginalized voices and identities to express themselves. As critic John Fekete summarizes, a society which supports the pluralism of value is certainly not ideal, but it offers the promise of "livelier, more colorful, and, one hopes, more tolerant culture" (Fekete ix). Moreover, feminist critic Angela McRobbie emphasizes that those who deplore the death of culture as a result of the disappearance of traditional high culture ignore the fact that the only type of identity and culture which was allowed to express itself throughout history is that of the white heterosexual male. Consequently, it is better for all identities to be incomplete and fragmented, rather than having only one which serves as the standard.

Furthermore, Postmodernist critics claim that the entire *high versus popul*ar distinction was based upon false premises and historical misconceptions. While intellectual Pierre Bourdieu

argues in *Distinction* that there is no such thing as pure taste or pure gaze, and taste is inherently linked to wealth and education, critic Lawrence Levine shows that the gap between high and popular was, in fact, artificially imposed during the 19th century, when the higher classes wanted to set themselves apart from the lower ones. An interesting example is the case of William Shakespeare's works. Although they were enjoyed by mass audiences throughout the 18th century, starting with the second half of the 19th century, critics began telling such types of public that they did not understand him. Thus, their access to his works was limited.

In the 1950s, the debate between high and popular culture coincides with a fervent debate over what is canonical and what is not. Most of the young Postmodernist writers, such as Leslie Fiedler, are against the canon, and they point out that it is a subjective and biased creation which, throughout history, has overlooked important works just because they were not written by white males. They argue, thus, that there should not be one single canon, but rather several. Various traditional critics, such as T. S. Eliot or Harold Bloom, claim that the canon is our only connection with what was written in the past, and we must do our best to preserve that which is of value, and that can only be done by employing the canon.

The requirements of the work of art which should be included in the canon(s) were, and still are, up for debate. Whilst traditional critics believe that only the aesthetic aspects should matter, most Postmodernists argue that the social efficiency of a work of art is more important than the other components. Thus, those invested in the study of humanist sciences should not only examine the works which are categorized as high culture, but should be familiar with various types of texts. As professor Michael Schudson concludes, "nothing that is human should be foreign to the 'humanities' in a university" (58).

In terms of genre hierarchy, critic Alastair Fowler shows that genres such as science fiction, music lyrics, or the gothic have been repeatedly ranked at the bottom of the literary hierarchy. Accordingly, the analytical chapters and the texts I have chosen demonstrate the way in which such genres are used by Postmodern writers in order to subvert the authorities and the hierarchy of taste. As such, each of the two analytical chapters begins with a short introduction meant to illustrate the transition of the genre from one which is overlooked by critics and considered mediocre, to one which proves subversive and empowering.

In the first analytical chapter, I have showed that science fiction texts such as Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, along with Kubrick's film adaptation, David Bowie's *Space Oddity* and

Blackstar use the traditional science fiction character of the astronaut as a metaphor for loneliness and the "inadequate" (as Bowie's calls it) identity. Moreover, they deconstruct the image of the traditional astronaut, which served as a role model in the science fiction community, pointing out his or her human nature. Likewise, the alien becomes, in David Bowie's work, the embodiment for what Angela McRobbie calls the "hybridic" Postmodern identity, or what Elena Gomel refers to as "testing-ground for new forms of subjectivity" (4).

Through Ziggy Stardust and Thomas Jerome Newton (from *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and *Lazarus*), the eccentric and the outsider are celebrated. The musical *Lazarus* also highlights the failure of the American Dream and the way in which the outsiders (or immigrants) are not allowed to enjoy the same opportunities as the others. As such, the aliens in Bowie's work are not aliens because they come from a different planet, but because they are utterly different, and they feel as if they did not fit in the society. In this manner, science fiction is aptly used in order to criticize certain aspects about our society.

The second analytical chapter shows that, similarly to science fiction, the gothic was also disregarded by critics due to its popularity and because of what was perceived as an uneducated audience, with an emphasis on excess and emotion. Nick Cave's novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, shows how in Postmodernism the conventions associated with this genre can empower marginal identities. Thus, by allowing the villain of the novel, Euchrid, who is also mute, to express himself in writing, the text allows for marginal voices to surface. Furthermore, the character's identification with abjection is yet another instance in which traditional hierarchies (of righteousness) are challenged. The small town is no longer portrayed as idyllic, such stereotypes being deconstructed by the narrative. The same preoccupation with the marginal is to be found on Nick Cave's album, *Murder Ballads*, and in Flannery O'Connor's short story collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, where the narrative focuses on deranged acts and characters.

Due to time and length concerns, this research has only encompassed a few texts, but it could be extended to most of David Bowie's and Nick Cave's works. As a matter of fact, the focus on these two authors is what makes this paper stand apart from others in the field, as, to my knowledge, the two have never been analyzed from such a perspective before. Most of the academic papers on David Bowie or Nick Cave either deal exclusively with their music or with their life (except for those which actually analyze Nick Cave's novels), and they are almost never

discussed in the larger context of literature as a whole or analyzed comparatively alongside traditional works of literature.

However, this analysis is by no means meant to provide a finite overview over Nick Cave's and David Bowie's involvement in culture and their interest in marginal and unformed identities. Such an analysis could be expanded to the other personas or alter egos Bowie has created throughout his career, such as Aladdin Sane or the Thin White Duke. Moreover, a more in-depth look at the albums Bowie released in the second half of his career, and which have been repeatedly overlooked by critics, who only focused on the albums he released in the 1970s and 1980s, could also be of interest. More precisely, albums such as *Earthling*, which shows the dark side of the consumerist society, or *The Next Day*, which is concerned with the correspondences between institutionalized religion and superstardom, could be taken into account. Nick Cave's interaction with his fans, through his *Conversations* tour, in which he directly answers questions from audiences on stage, in between songs, as well as through the *Red Hand Files* website, where he converses with his fans, could serve as the perfect exemplifications of the way in which Postmodern artists interact with audiences, and the way in which the creation act becomes a collaborative experience.

To conclude, this paper has made it a point to show that popular culture is not inherently good or bad. In the context of the irrelevance of the *high versus pop* distinction, and with the intellectual no longer at the head of the cultural hierarchy, the ways in which certain aspects of society (such as the alienated, fragmented, and marginal identity) were approached by popular culture demonstrate that art can also emerge from the margins of the society. Moreover, the previously disregarded genres become a force of empowerment for the unheard voices, and, finally, the blending of the high and pop make art more accessible, no longer subjected to artificial constraints that made it available only to the few.

Appendix

During Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' concert in Zagreb, Croatia, in June 2018, I gave Nick Cave a letter in which I asked him three questions: 1. What is his take on the high culture vs pop culture debate?, 2. What is his opinion on Bob Dylan winning the Nobel prize for literature?, and 3. In what ways have William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor influenced his work? Below are his full answers, which he provided via e-mail on the 29th of June 2018.

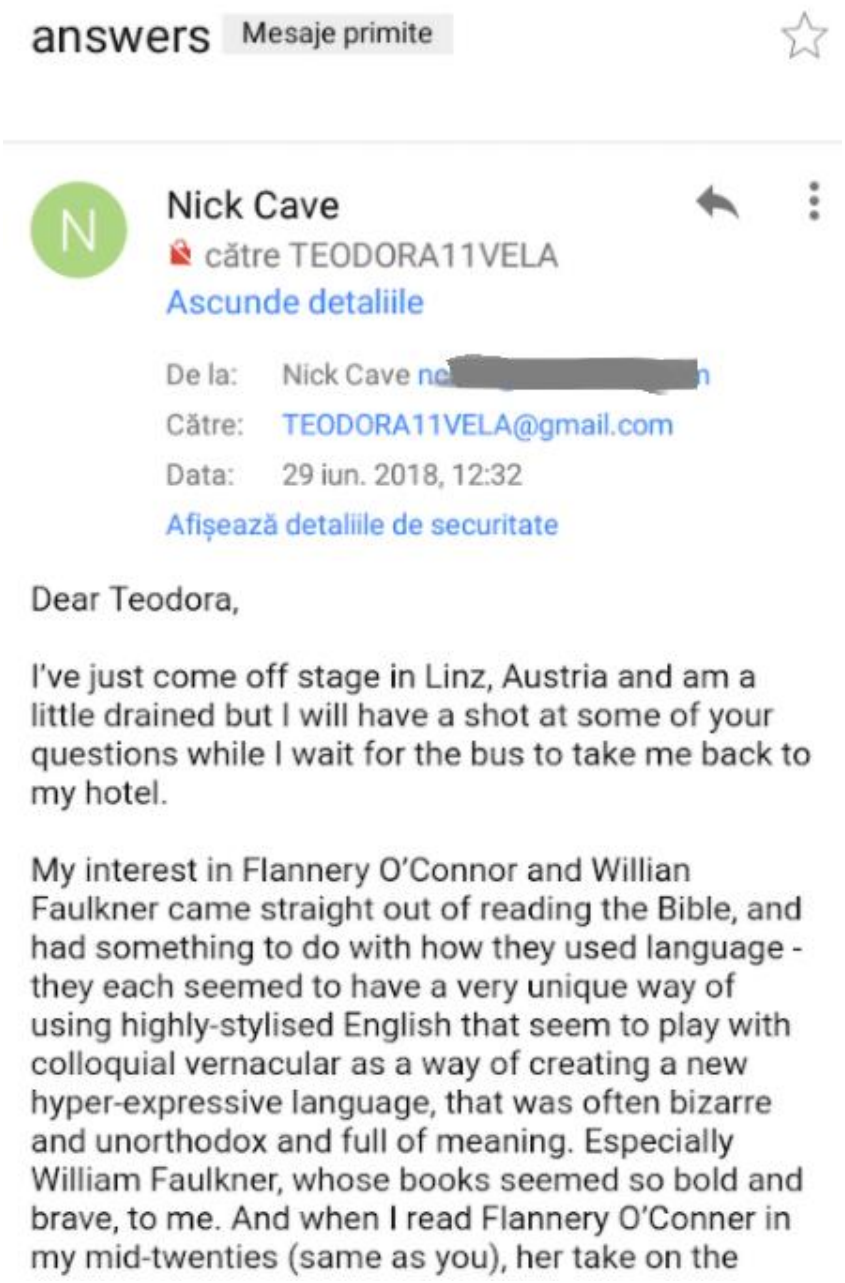
1. "As for the distinction between high and pop culture, well, I can say this. I am still not convinced that rock lyrics can live alongside poetry very comfortably. Song lyrics are written in a completely different way for a completely different purpose and although there are certainly lyric writers, like the often cited Bob Dylan, that can write lyrics that have the same verbal expertise as the best of poets, their intent is very different. Bob Dylan still writes words primarily to be sung, and so his choice of words is very different than if he were writing a poem. There is a looseness and lack of form that is necessary for singing. Songwriting is designed to be heard by the masses, to appeal to the everyman, to hit the listener in the heart and is dealing directly with the manipulation of people's emotions. A song ultimately assaults the listener from many different directions at the same time - lyric, voice, melody, rhythm etc. That is why it is hugely effective and has emotional resonance that is deep, profound and that can actually change the body chemistry. Poems, that are elitist by nature, I'm afraid to say, rarely have the same reach. Although pop songwriting is considered a low art form, it actually has a transcendent capacity far beyond that of a poem. It took me many years to work this out, as my father was an English literature [teacher], who thought that poetry was the greatest of art forms. He was wrong."

2. "As for the Nobel Prize for Literature - I'm not sure that Bob Dylan was the right choice. I think, ultimately, Bob Dylan stands beyond this award. He exists on a different plane, above and beyond literature."

3. "My interest in Flannery O'Connor and Willian Faulkner came straight out of reading the Bible, and had something to do with how they used language - they each seemed to have a very unique way of using highly-stylised English that seem to play with colloquial vernacular as a way of creating a new hyper-expressive language, that was often bizarre and unorthodox and full of

meaning. Especially William Faulkner, whose books seemed so bold and brave, to me. And when I read Flannery O'Conner in my mid-twenties (same as you), her take on the world seemed so wonderfully nihilistic

The e-mail can be read in its entirety in the following print screens:



answers Mesaje primite

N

Nick Cave

către TEODORA11VELA

Ascunde detaliile

De la: Nick Cave n[redacted]n

Către: TEODORA11VELA@gmail.com

Data: 29 iun. 2018, 12:32

Afișează detaliile de securitate

Dear Teodora,

I've just come off stage in Linz, Austria and am a little drained but I will have a shot at some of your questions while I wait for the bus to take me back to my hotel.

My interest in Flannery O'Connor and Willian Faulkner came straight out of reading the Bible, and had something to do with how they used language - they each seemed to have a very unique way of using highly-stylised English that seem to play with colloquial vernacular as a way of creating a new hyper-expressive language, that was often bizarre and unorthodox and full of meaning. Especially William Faulkner, whose books seemed so bold and brave, to me. And when I read Flannery O'Conner in my mid-twenties (same as you), her take on the

world seemed so wonderfully nihilistic. Having read your letter, I just Amazoned the Complete Short Stories of Flannery O'Connor as it seems so long ago that I read them. Thank you for reminding me of her. I'll enjoy reading her on tour. Her story *A Good Man Is Hard To Find* remains one of the most startling and brutal short stories I have ever read.

As for the distinction between high and pop culture, well, I can say this. I am still not convinced that rock lyrics can live alongside poetry very comfortably. Song lyrics are written in a completely different way for a completely different purpose and although there are certainly lyric writers, like the often cited Bob Dylan, that can write lyrics that have the same verbal expertise as the best of poets, their intent is very different. Bob Dylan still writes words primarily to be sung, and so his choice of words is very different than if he were writing a poem. There is a looseness and lack of form that is necessary for singing. Songwriting is designed to be heard by the masses, to appeal to the everyman, to hit the listener in the heart and is dealing directly with the manipulation of peoples emotions. A song ultimately assaults the listener from many different directions at the same time - lyric, voice, melody, rhythm etc. That is why it is hugely effective and has emotional resonance that is deep, profound and that can actually change the body chemistry. Poems, that are elitist by nature, Im afraid to say, rarely have the same reach. Although pop songwriting is considered a low art form, it actually has a transcendent capacity far beyond that of a poem. It took me many years to work this out, as my father was an English literature, who thought that poetry was the greatest of art forms. He was wrong.

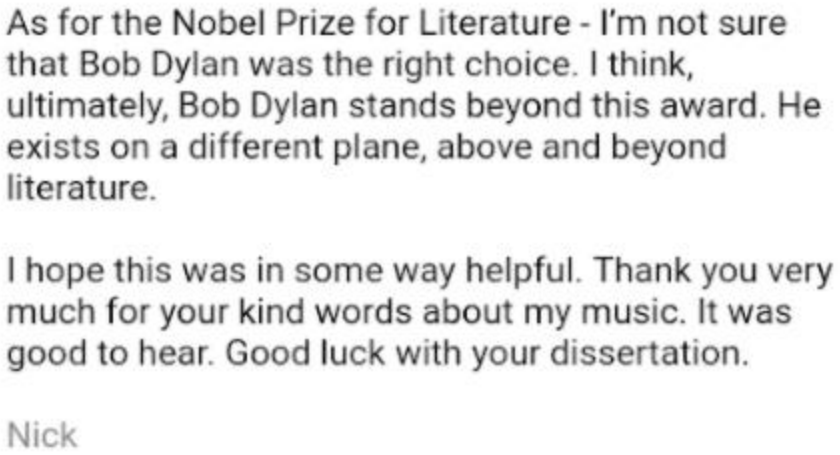


Figure 4. Screenshot of Nick Cave's response via e-mail

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